



THE BALLADS

ENGLISH LITERATURE

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# THE BALLAD

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The twelvemonth and a day being up  
The dead began to speak:  
'Oh who sits weeping on my grave  
And will not let me sleep?'

'Tis I, my love, sits on your grave  
And will not let you sleep:  
For I crave one kiss of your clay-cold lips,  
And that is all I seek.'

A CRITIC is a hunter of unquiet graves. He tries to evoke the presence of a living art, but usually succeeds only in disturbing the peace of the dead. The critics of the ballad are, perhaps, the worst hunters of all: over a handful of simple and splendid poetry they have heaped a great mound of speculation and controversy. Instead of bringing the past to life, they themselves have been stiffened by a cold hand. They should have listened to the dead lover's warning:

'You crave one kiss of my clay-cold lips;  
But my breath smells earthy strong;  
If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips,  
Your time will not be long.'

What, then, is the excuse for yet another book on the ballads? It is that a short summary of a few of the things that are known about them, one that is not too heavily laden with theory, may be useful. What follows is offered as a guide to a jungle territory: at most it may be able to point out some of the main features of the landscape.

The word "ballad" can be used correctly of any narrative

poem in short stanzas. But the familiar ballads of the anthologies belong to a special kind of literature which has been assembled in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, edited by F. J. Child of Harvard University, and published between 1882 and 1898. As well as "popular", they have been called "traditional", "folk", and sometimes "Child" ballads. Apart from this special type of ballad, there are many other kinds: "broadside" ballads, printed on single sheets and journalistic in content; "literary" ballads, written in imitation of the popular manner by learned poets (the "Ancient Mariner" is the most famous example); and modern popular ballads like those sung to-day by lumberjacks and cowboys in the United States. About these I shall have little to say except in so far as they touch on the "Child" ballads. Throughout, I shall refer to the "Child" ballads simply as ballads.

Child edited 305 ballads and found over a thousand versions of them. With the greatest persistence he had looked into every possible written source, both printed and manuscript. His colleague, G. L. Kittredge, who saw the work through the press after Child's death, believed that it "comprised the whole extant mass of the material".<sup>1</sup> Since then, however, collectors of folksong have taken down from singers in England, Scotland, and America about a dozen other ballads of the same type and hundreds of versions of many of those already included by Child. Yet Child's is still the standard work and the basis of all modern studies of the ballads. I shall therefore follow the usual practice of attaching Child's title and number to all the ballads that I mention. Thus, the description of the stanzas quoted at the head of this chapter runs: "The Unquiet Grave" (78 A, 3-5).

The Child ballads are as hard to define as they are easy to recognize. They are anonymous, narrative poems, nearly always written down in short stanzas of two or four lines. They are distinguished from all other types of narrative poetry by a peculiar and effective way of telling their stories. They deal with one single situation and deal with it dramatically, beginning "in the fifth act"; and there is a high proportion of dialogue to stage-direction. They are not only anony-

mous but also impersonal: the storyteller does not intrude his personality, and there is no moralizing or didacticism. Again, the ballads are distinguished from all other types of poetry by their complete freedom from the poetic diction fashionable in any period: they have their own peculiar rhetoric and phraseology. The best definition is Gerould's, which sums up the three main constants found in all the ballads. "A ballad is a folksong that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in event and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias."<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that the ballads are "songs" and are incomplete without music, but "folksong" itself requires a further definition. If you define it as song "originating from the people" or "expressing the aspirations of the people", you will become involved in speculations about the nature and origins of the "folk" which, as I shall try to show, lead nowhere. The only satisfactory definition of a "folksong" is a song that has been transmitted orally: that is, learnt by word of mouth by one generation from preceding generations, without the assistance of the written word. That definition could be applied to the ballads in this country but for the fact that there has been no such thing as purely oral transmission here for the last four hundred and fifty years. Ever since the invention of cheap printing, broadside versions of the ballads have been travelling about the country and have been added to the repertoire of folk-singers. Purely oral transmission can exist only among an entirely illiterate community, cut off from all contact with book-learning, and such a community has hardly existed in England or Scotland during the recorded history of the ballads—which begins only in the late Middle Ages.

The majority of the versions of the ballads in Child's collection were collected from folk-tradition, some faithfully, and some, as we shall see, with a good deal of editing, while about the collection of many others nothing definite is known at all. The Robin Hood ballads have as their only reliable sources early manuscripts and seventeenth-century broadsides; and wherever they have turned up among folksingers,



a ballad taken down from folksingers in the twentieth century may have a more ancient history than one found in a fifteenth-century manuscript. The following headings approximate to Child's divisions:

1. Ballads belonging to the common stock of international folksong:
  - (a) Ballads of magic;
  - (b) Romantic and Tragic Ballads.
2. Ballads from the repertoire of late mediæval minstrelsy.
3. Ballads of yeoman minstrelsy.
4. Historical Ballads:
  - (a) Fully historical, dealing with real national events;
  - (b) Semi-historical, dealing more vaguely with minor and local events.
5. Comic songs.

Most of the best ballads are in the first group, which includes about eighty-five. Some are found in one form or another in almost every European country but most are related only to the two nearest "regions" of balladry, the French and the Scandinavian. Of these, the Scandinavian are the most important; nearly all of the eighty-five are found there, and about twenty-five of them, there only. Ballads have moved freely from one part of Europe to another, just as folktales have done, and it is often impossible to point to the country of origin. There is no direct evidence that this type of ballad is the most ancient, but there is indirect evidence in the fact that they embody primitive folk-beliefs or reflect the customs of early mediæval society.

The "riddle" ballads are at the beginning of Child's collection: "Riddles Wisely Expounded" (1), "The Elfin Knight" (2), and "The Fause Knight upon the Road" (3). The basic theme of these is that of a mortal outwitting a supernatural being by quickness of wit, and of the magic power of the Word embodied in riddles. This is a very ancient *motif* in folklore, though it is apparently hardly found at all

in ballads other than English and German. Other "supernatural" ballads are found among numbers 4-28 and 39-52 in Child, a few others elsewhere. They are about fairies and ghosts, witchcraft and transformations, and they are often of great imaginative power. The most famous are "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" (4), "The Twa Sisters" (10), "The Cruel Mother" (20), "Tam Lin" (39), "Sweet William's Ghost" (77, often printed as the end of "Clerk Saunders"), "The Unquiet Grave" (78), and "The Wife of Usher's Well" (79).

The ballads of Romance and Tragedy are found among numbers 4-28 and 29-52, where they are not always very distinct from the supernatural ballads; and also in a later group, numbers 58-105. They are the "central" type of ballad and they usually fulfil Gerould's definition, in that they deal with single situations (of jealousy, abduction, and revenge). Not all of them have a tragic ending, and so Ballads of Chivalry may be a better description. There are other fine ballads of this type: "Lord Randal" (12), "Edward" (13), "Sir Patrick Spens" (58), "Fair Annie" (62), "Child Waters" (63), "Clerk Saunders" (69), "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (73), "Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard" (81), "Lamkin" (93), and "Johnie Cock" (114).

The class derived from the mediæval romances consists of the least "popular" ballads. They are certainly not "popular" in origin and are almost certainly deliberate adaptations by minstrels in the late middle ages. Few of them have ever been popular with folksingers. Some are found only in the seventeenth-century Percy Folio Manuscript and have perhaps never reached folk-tradition. Child 29-38 are of this type and there are others. "The Boy and the Mantle" (29), "King Arthur and King Cornwall" (30), "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (31), and "King Henry" (32) descend from the Arthurian romances; "Hind Horn" (17) from the "Horn" cycle, and the most beautiful ballad of this type, "Thomas Rymmer" (37), from the romance of "Thomas of Erceldoune".

A sub-section of this group which is probably non-popular in origin is that of the ballads on Christian subjects. These stand outside the main body of ballads, which are remarkably

little affected by Christian belief. Originally, they were, perhaps, pious adaptations from a secular form by ecclesiastics, as many of the carols were. But they are not strictly orthodox, in that their material comes mainly from the Apocryphal Gospels. The earliest poem of this type in Child is "Judas" (23), found only in a thirteenth-century manuscript. Others are more genuinely popular in their history: the exquisite "Cherry-Tree Carol" (54), and "Dives and Lazarus" (56) have often been collected from folksingers.

"Yeoman minstrelsy" is Sir E. K. Chambers's<sup>5</sup> description of the Robin Hood ballads, which, with a few others of the same type, make up a large part of Child's collection (115-154). Robin Hood was the hero of the yeomanry, and yeomen are referred to throughout these ballads in a flattering way. They are full of conventional tags with which the minstrel addresses his audience:

Herken, god yemen,  
Comley, corteys, and god' . . .  
(*"Robin Hood and the Potter"*.)

Apart from "Robin Hood and the Monk", the best are "A Gest of Robyn Hode" (117), which consists of a number of ballads stitched together, and "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne" (118). "Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesly" (116) is not part of the Robin Hood cycle, but is yeoman minstrelsy of the same kind.

No ballad can be called truly historical, for none is reliable on matters of fact. There is rarely any proof that such ballads have been written within living memory of the events they describe. There are, nevertheless, a group of ballads which can be called "historical" since they are about well-known national events. The best known are "The Battle of Otterburn" (161) and "The Hunting of the Cheviot" (162, better known as "Chevy Chase"). The earliest versions of these are probably of minstrel origin. Other historical ballads, few of them at all good, make up a group in Child, numbers 156-168.

The semi-historical ballads are more interesting (169-271).

They are about minor events in national history, which are, of course, major events for a local community, some of which have been recorded in historical documents. There is no clear dividing line between these ballads and the more properly historical, except that they do not as a rule show the same traces of professional minstrelsy. They record heroic actions like cattle-raiding and bride-stealing, murders and intrigues and the principal characters are usually small landed gentry. The Border ballads make up a sub-group here, and the best are "Dick o' the Cow" (185) and "Hughie Grame" (191). Because of the high prestige of Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, these have been spoken of as the typical ballads, and it is often believed that the Border is the home of the ballad. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ballads have been found in the folksong of all parts of England and Lowland Scotland, and the most productive area is not the Border country but Aberdeenshire. A very high proportion of all the versions edited by Child, and some of the best of the semi-historical ballads like "Captain Car or Edom o' Gordon" (178), come from that county.

Finally, there is a group of songs at the end of Child's collection which have not much to do with the narrative ballad. They are comic songs, constructed round a central episode in something like the ballad style: "Our Goodman" (274), for example, which is about the outwitting of a cuckold.

The ballads can also be classified according to their present popularity among folksingers. At the time of Child's death, it was generally believed that ballad-singing had come to an end; but since the beginning of this century, a great many new versions have been found, in England notably by Cecil Sharp and his colleagues of *The Journal of the Folk-song Society*,<sup>6</sup> in Scotland by Gavin Greig (*Last Leaves*),<sup>7</sup> and in the United States by Cecil Sharp and dozens of collectors after him. In the United States, about eighty of the Child ballads are being sung to-day; Greig found about the same number in Scotland, though not exactly the same ones; the collectors in England found rather fewer. Apart from comic songs, the modern folksingers in England, Scotland, and the

United States prefer the ballads which have simple situations and violent action, usually tragic. They are not, on the whole, interested in historical or local detail; but they are still fond of the supernatural. The most widely distributed of the Child ballads are the following: "The Elfin Knight" (2), "Lady Isabel and The Elf-Knight" (4), "Lord Randal" (12), "The Cruel Mother" (20), "The Three Ravens" (26), "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship" (46), "Lord Bateman" ("Young Beichan", (53)), "Lady Maisry" (65), "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (73), "Fair Margaret and Sweet William" (74), "Lord Lovel" (75), "Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard" (81), "Barbara Allen" (84), "Lamkin" (93), "The Maid Freed from the Gallows" (95), "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington" (105), "Sir Hugh" (155), "The Death of Queen Jane" (170), "The Gypsy Laddie" (200), "Jamie Douglas" ("O Waly Waly", (204)), "Geordie" (209), "The Demon Lover" (243), and five songs: "Our Goodman" (274), "The Wife Wrapt in Wether's Skin" (277), "The Farmer's Curst Wife" (278), "The Sweet Trinity" ("The Golden Vanity", (286)), and "The Mermaid" (289). There are also a few ballads which are heard in Scotland and America only, like "Edward" (13), and "The Wife of Usher's Well" (29), though these may have been sung in England at one time.

Finally, something should be said about the classification by nationality of the ballads of Great Britain. Neither from their present and recent distribution among folksingers, nor from their past history in as far as it can be traced, can the ballads be shown as definitely divided into Scottish and English. The only clear cases are the Robin Hood ballads which have an exclusively English history; and the Border and Aberdeenshire ballads of the semi-historical class, which have never been found far from their place of origin. The ballads based on Christian stories have hardly ever been collected in Scotland; and the Scottish versions generally have a richer content of folk-beliefs and pagan survivals. Supernatural ballads are mainly Scottish but not exclusively so. "The Unquiet Grave" is purely English and many versions of others of this type have been found in England. Of the best

ballads in the Supernatural and Romantic group, only the following seem to be distinctively Scottish in history and background: "Babylon" (14), "Allison Gross" (35), "Thomas Rymer" (37), "Tam Lin" (39), "Proud Lady Margaret" (47), "Sir Patrick Spens" (58), "Clerk Saunders" (69), "Sweet William's Ghost" (77), "Fause Foodrage" (89), and "Young Waters" (94). The conclusion to be drawn from the available evidence is that England and Scotland form a common ballad area, just as they form a common area for other varieties of folklore and for all kinds of mediæval verse. (By Scotland, of course, Lowland Scotland is meant. It has a cultural history distinct from that of the Highlands, and very like that of Saxon England.) Because the best collections of the early nineteenth century were made in Scotland, and therefore so many of Child's versions are in a Scottish dialect, the basic identity of Scottish and English balladry has been obscured, and the facts have been distorted by nationalistic Scots and sentimental Englishmen.

In this short survey of ballad texts, I have discussed only those included in Child's collection. But there are a few others of the same type which Child overlooked or rejected; and since they seem to conform with the ballad æsthetic, and contain much beautiful and unfamiliar verse, they should be mentioned here.

Only nine of them are worth considering: "The Bitter Withy", "Still Growing", "Corpus Christi", "The Seven Virgins", "The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green", "Bruton Town", "The Shooting of his Dear", "The Bold Fishermen", and, more doubtfully, "Six Dukes Went A-fishing". "The Bitter Withy" is the only one of these which has been universally accepted. It was first printed in 1905, and since then other versions, some with tunes, have been collected from folksingers. It is a ballad of the "ecclesiastical" type; like others of the same kind ("The Cherry Tree Carol" and "The Carnal and the Crane"), it is based on a legend from the Apocryphal Gospels. For some reason these barbarous and fantastic legends seem to have been preferred by folksingers to the normal Gospel stories, perhaps because there may

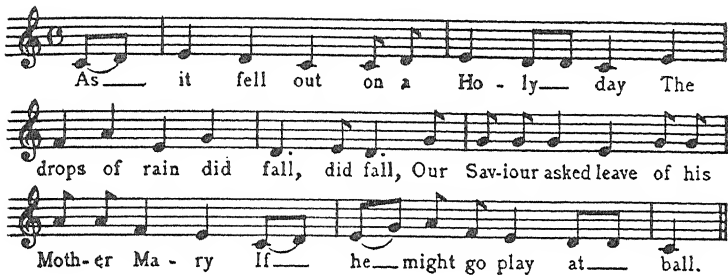
have been an undercurrent of heresy and paganism in the Christianity of the English peasantry. "The Bitter Withy" handles one of the legends with gaiety and boldness. The following text is the one printed in 1905<sup>8</sup>; the accompanying tune is that belonging to a slightly different version noted by R. Vaughan Williams.<sup>9</sup>

1. As it fell out on a Holy Day,  
The drops of rain did fall, did fall,  
Our Saviour asked leave of His mother Mary  
If He might go play at ball.
2. 'To play at ball, my own dear Son,  
It's time You was going or gone,  
But be sure let me hear no complaint of You,  
At night when You do come home.'
3. It was upling scorn and downling scorn,\*  
Oh, there He met three jolly jerdins;  
Oh, there He asked the jolly jerdins†  
If they would go play at ball.
4. 'Oh, we are lords' and ladies' sons,  
Born in bower or in hall,  
And You are some poor maid's child  
Born'd in an ox's stall.'
5. 'If you are lords' and ladies' sons,  
Born'd in bower or in hall,  
Then at the last I'll make it appear  
That I am above you all.'
6. Our Saviour built a bridge with the beams of the sun,  
And over it He gone, He gone He.  
And after followed the three jolly jerdins,  
And drowned they were all three.

\* ? for "It was up with his ball and down with his ball".

† ? for "jordans" (pitchers), which occur in a similar Apocryphal legend; other versions have "three rich young lords or 'jolly' dons".

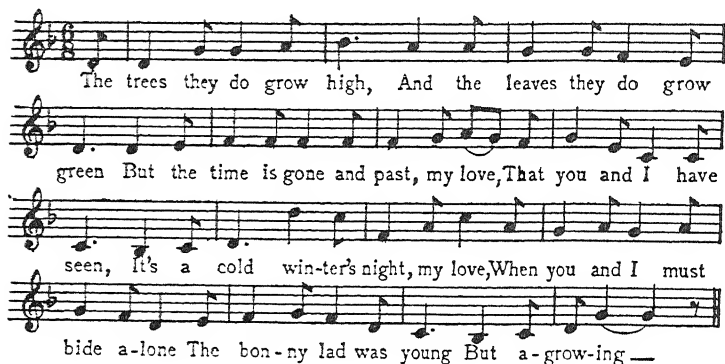
7. It was upling scorn and downling scorn,  
The mothers of them did whoop and call,  
Crying out, 'Mary mild, call home your Child,  
For ours are drowned all.'
8. Mary mild, Mary mild, called home her Child,  
And laid our Saviour across her knee,  
And with a whole handful of bitter withy  
She gave Him slashes three.
9. Then He says to His mother, 'Oh! the withy, oh! the withy,  
The bitter withy that causes me to smart, to smart  
Oh! the withy, it shall be the very first tree  
That perishes at the heart.'



"Corpus Christi", which is also called "Over Yonder's a Park", is an exquisite folksong; so is "The Seven Virgins", or "Under the Leaves of Life". They have so little narrative in them that they have been classed as "carols" or religious folksongs; but I am prepared to accept the former, at least, as a genuine ballad. (It is given in the next chapter.) It is rather surprising the Child left out "Still Growing" or "My Bonny Lad is Young". This ballad is apparently founded on a true incident. Sir Robert Innes obtained the guardianship of the young Lord Craigton in 1631 and soon afterwards married him to his eldest daughter, Elizabeth Innes: the young husband died in 1634. This ballad spread from Scotland to England and America, and in the course of time, it has lost



all its local references and has developed into a mysterious elegy. Cecil Sharp's version from Somerset has a particularly beautiful Dorian tune, which explains the elaborate and irregular verse pattern:<sup>10</sup>



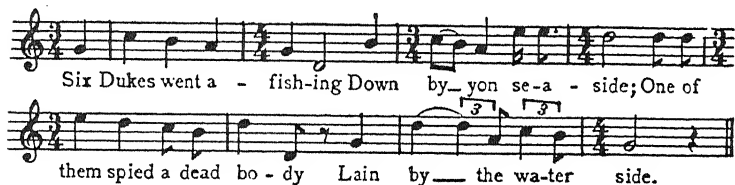
The trees they do grow high, And the leaves they do grow  
green But the time is gone and past, my love, That you and I have  
seen, It's a cold win-ter's night, my love, When you and I must  
bide a-lone The bon-ny lad was young But a-grow-ing —

### STILL GROWING

1. The trees they do grow high, and the leaves they do grow green;  
The time is gone and past, my love, that you and I have seen:  
It's a cold winters' night, my love, when you and I must bide alone  
The bonny lad was young,  
but a-growing.
2. 'O father, dear father, I'm feared you've done me harm  
You've married me a boy and I fear he is too young.'  
'O daughter, dear daughter, and if you stay at home and wait  
along o' me  
A lady you shall be,  
While he's a-growing.
3. 'We'll send him to the college for one year or two  
And then perhaps in time, my love, a man he will grow  
I will buy you a bunch of white ribbons to tie about his bonny,  
bonny waist  
To let the ladies know  
That he's married.'

4. At the age of sixteen, he was a married man,  
     At the age of seventeen, she brought him a son;  
     At the age of eighteen, my love, O his grave was growing green,  
     And so she put an end  
     To his growing.
  
5. 'I made my love a shroud of the holland so fine,'  
     And every stitch she put in it the tears came trickling down;  
     O once I had a sweetheart, but now I have got never a one  
     So fare you well my own true love  
     For ever.

The other ballads omitted by Child are on the whole rather debased, but they are certainly genuine folksongs and structurally of the "Child" type. The most interesting of those I have mentioned is "Six Dukes Went A-fishing".<sup>11</sup> A poor version of this song was known to Child; he printed it in his notes to "The Death of Queen Jane" (170), which it resembles. It seems to be descended from a broadside called "The Noble Funeral of the Renowned Champion, the Duke of Grafton, who was slain at the siege of Cork and Royally Interred in Westminster Abbey"; the Duke died in 1690, and the broadside was licensed in the same year. Miss Broadwood, however, thinks it may also refer to William de Pole, first Duke of Suffolk, whose death and funeral in 1450 were like the duke's in the ballad. (In II, *Henry VI*, iv, 4 Queen Margaret laments over the head of Suffolk after his body has been washed up on the shore.) Dr. Percy Grainger recorded three versions at Brigg, Lincolnshire, in 1906, of which this is the first:



1. Six dukes went a-fishing  
Down by yon seaside.  
One of them spied a dead body  
Lain by the water-side.
2. The one said to each other,  
These words I've heard them say:  
It's the Royal Duke of Grantham  
That the tide has washed away.
3. They took him up to Portsmouth,  
To a place where he was known;  
From there up to London  
To the place where he was born.
4. They took out his bowels  
And stretched out his feet  
And they balméd his body  
With roses so sweet.
5. Six Dukes stood before him,  
Twelve raised him from the ground;  
Nine Lords followed after him,  
In their black mourning gown.
6. Black was their mourning  
And white was their wand,  
And so yellow were the flamboys  
What they carried in their hand.
7. He now lies betwixt two towers,  
He now lies in cold clay;\*  
When the Royal Queen of Grantham  
Went weeping away.

This song is corrupt, and in some places nonsensical; but it has more poetry than many of the ballads in Child.

\* Another version has "blue" clay.

The clear, heraldic colours are remarkable, especially in the version that has "blue" clay, and, as Mr. A. L. Lloyd says, the verse has a "cold passionate wolfish quality". It has lost the debased rhetoric of the seventeenth-century broadside, which runs:

Twelve Lords went before him, six bore him to the ground  
While the drums and the trumpets did solemnly sound . . .  
But Death, that grim King now hath took him away  
(And left us in sorrow and sadness this day) . . .

These "new" ballads and many new versions of the Child ballads have been printed and discussed in recent books that have supplemented Child's work. Two most important collections appeared before Child's death: Baring-Gould and Sheppard, *Songs of the West* (1889-91),<sup>12</sup> and Broadwood and Fuller-Maitland, *English County Songs* (1893).<sup>13</sup> These collectors were among the first to show that folksongs and ballads were still sung in modern England. The work was continued by the collaborators in the *Journal of the Folksong Society*, which was founded in 1899. The files of this review up to 1926 provide the best single body of modern ballad versions. The most famous of its collaborators was Cecil Sharp, who later edited a number of fine collections including *Folksongs from Somerset* (1904-9),<sup>14</sup> and *Folksongs of England* (1908-12).<sup>14</sup> Dr. Vaughan Williams is the other great pioneer of English Folkmusic. The *Journal of American Folklore*<sup>15</sup> began in 1888, and from the beginning of this century it has published a great many American versions of the ballads. The first major book of American versions, however, was the work of Cecil Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1917).<sup>16</sup> Since then, a number of admirable collections have appeared in the United States, beginning with *British Ballads from Maine*, by Phillips Barry and others (1929).<sup>17</sup> The last notable collection to appear in this country was Gavin Greig's *Last Leaves* (1925),<sup>7</sup> which proved that admirable versions of Child ballads were sung

in the north-east of Scotland at the beginning of this century. Folksong is not yet dead in this country, as Mr. E. J. Moeran has shown. But since Greig's *Last Leaves* appeared, the collecting of further versions of British Ballads has been taking place almost entirely in the United States.

## CHAPTER II

### THE POETRY OF THE BALLADS

THE only thing that is common to all true ballads and which distinguishes them from other kinds of poetry is their peculiar way of telling a story. To this narrative technique everything else is made subordinate, conventions, rhetoric, and dialogue alike, and every criticism of the ballad must begin by discussing it. We have, however, very few critical terms useful for analysing narrative; recent critics have been concerned mainly with poetry with a rich metaphoric texture and complex pattern of meaning, and the methods they have worked out are hardly applicable. It may therefore be useful to borrow something from the criticism of the film. In *The Film Sense*<sup>1</sup> Eisenstein discusses "montage", the technique of joining "shots" or "frames" together significantly; and with some ingenuity he applies his analysis to literature. He takes some of the battle scenes of *Paradise Lost* and breaks them up into a series of shots taken, as it were, from various directions and depths. He shows how Milton has assembled these shots to give movement to the narrative, and how he has counter-pointed them against the metrical pattern: as for example where he describes the approach of the host of Satan in Book VI:

. . . at last  
Farr in th' Horizon to the North appeer'd  
From skirt to skirt a fierie Region, stretcht  
In battailous aspect, and neerer view  
Bristl'd with upright beams innumerable  
Of rigid Spears, and Helmets throng'd, and Shields  
Various, with boastful Argument portraid  
The banded powers of *Satan* hasting on  
With furious expedition . . .

Milton starts with a distant picture, then puts in a "cinematographic instruction" in the third full line, to "change

10. O lang, lang may the ladies stand,  
Wi thair gold kems in their hair,  
Waiting for thair ain deir lords,  
For they'll se thame na mair.
11. Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,  
It's fiftie fadom deip,  
And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence,  
Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

There is a classic example of montage in the third stanza, with its rapid jump:

And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence  
Was walking on the sand.

Sir Patrick's character is revealed by the two shots of the fourth stanza. In the next three stanzas, the tension is rapidly worked up by the dialogue between Sir Patrick and the sailor: one vivid image of a natural portent is enough to create a sense of doom. The disaster is scarcely pictured at all; instead we get an ironic comment on the behaviour of the noble lords as the ship founders and a rapid and highly imaginative shot of their hats bobbing about on the water. The full force of the disaster is brought out by the transition to the shore: two grave and formal stanzas in parallel describe the ladies with their fans and their combs, emblems of wealth and station. At this point the ballad has moved away from pure narrative to lyrical comment; but there is a change back to direct visualization in the last stanza, which gives only a still shot of the sea as an elegy:

Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour  
It's fiftie fadom deip,  
And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence  
Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

The ballads lack the elaborate counterpoint of image against metrical pattern which Eisenstein sees in Milton, but they

have a kind of counterpoint of their own. The story moves forward in bounds, against a background of regular stanzaic melody and against the formal patterning of folk art: the repetitions in threes and sevens and the conventional phrases. The rapidity and violence of the action is all the more striking because of the decorum and formality maintained in the ballads. Gummere has well described their movement as "leaping and lingering".

The main end of the ballads is to present the story dramatically, and therefore explanation, moralist comment, and even original phraseology are suppressed. Unconventional metaphors are rare, perhaps because they might hold up the narrative. There are not many things in the ballads like this beautiful stanza from "The Gay Goshawk" (96 E 6):

The red that is in my love's cheek  
Is like blood spilt among the snaw.  
The white that is on her breast-bone  
Is like the down on the white sea-maw.\*

or this from "Willie and Lady Maisry" (70 A, 8):

With her feet as white as sleet  
She strode her bower within,  
And with her fingers long and small  
She's lootin Sweet Willie in.

The ballads use their own peculiar rhetoric and poetic diction to increase the dramatic pressure. Phrases like "He hadna gone a mile, a mile . . ." or "He bent his bow and swam" or "The up and spoke the little foot-page", and conventional epithets like "the gold so red" or "the wan water" are constantly found. The ballads are sternly economical in their vocabulary. They use the Homeric epithet for much the same reason as Homer is said to have used it: to avoid distraction from the story-telling.<sup>2</sup> The listeners can rest on the familiar and repeated epithets and so concentrate the better on the working-out of the plot.

\* Mew



Another rhetorical device is "parallelism in phrase and idea", as Gerould calls it, and the favourite way of developing this parallelism is by incremental repetition. Each stanza repeats the one before it, but with some addition which leads on to the climax. The "nuncupative testament" which appears in several ballads, shows this device built into the structure of the story. In "The Cruel Brother" (11 A) the murdered bride names her heirs in turn:

21. 'O what will you leave to your father dear?'  
'The silver-shode steed that brought me here.'
22. 'What will you leave to your mother dear?'  
'My velvet pall and my silken gear.'
23. 'What will you leave to your sister Anne?'  
'My silken scarf and my gowden fan.'
24. 'What will you leave to your sister Grace?'  
'My bloody cloaths to wash and dress.'
25. 'What will you leave to your brother John?'  
'The gallows-tree to hang him on.'
26. 'What will you leave to your brother John's wife?'  
'The wilderness to end her life.'

The monotonous rocking movement of these repetitions, and the conventional gorgeousness of the silk, gold, and silver, work together to create an almost liturgical solemnity; and they help to evoke the supernatural atmosphere which is an essential part of the best ballads. Yet another device is the apparently irrelevant refrain<sup>3</sup> which intersperses the bare recital of tragic events with a rich pattern of flowers and trees: the quenching of human life is ironically contrasted with the continuity of natural life. This, too, adds to the formal, even ritualistic character of the ballads:

1. She sat down below a thorn,  
*Fine flowers in the valley*  
 And there she has her sweet babe born  
*And the green leaves they grow rarely.*

Smile na sae sweet, my bonie babe,  
 And ye smile sae sweet, ye'll smile me dead.

She's taen out her little pen-knife  
 And twinnd the sweet babe o its life.

She's howket a grave by the light o the moon  
 And there she's buried her sweet babe in.

As she was going to the church,  
 She saw a sweet babe in the porch

'O sweet babe, and thou were mine  
 I wad cleed thee in the silk so fine.

'O mother dear, when I was thine,  
*Fine flowers in the valley*  
 You did na prove to me sae kind.'  
*And the green leaves they grow rarely.* (20 B)

The narrative technique that I have described is the distinctive feature of the ballads, but it is not the only thing that gives ballad poetry its beauty. There is also a quality which the ballads share with other folksong; it is hard to define but may be described as a penumbra of folklore or as "folk imagination". It is artificial to break the poetry of the ballads down into a number of constituents—montage, rhetoric, and diction on the one hand and folklore on the other—separating the way the ballads are constructed from the things they are about. The traditional division of poetry into form and content is even more misleading with the ballads than with more learned poetry. Formal devices do not make up the whole of the ballad æsthetic: if they did, translations of ballads into other languages might be better than they are; but even the best translations, like so many literary pastiches

of the ballads, sound curiously flat. The technical components are really effective only in their context; and that context is a special cultural and artistic tradition. The ballads are closely associated with a particular way of living and thinking; in one sense, the folklore is the poetry. I shall try to describe this way of life in later chapters; here I am concerned only with the literary effects of which it is capable.

The ballad attitude to life gives an unique note to the poetry: an impersonality, a detachment and ironic understatement which appears in Fair Annie's words:

Gin my seven sons were seven young rats,  
 Running on the castle wa,  
 And I were a grey cat mysell  
 I soon would worry them a'. (62 A, 23)

and to Fair Ellen's

She said, Lullabye, my owne deere child!  
 Lullabye, deere child, deere!  
 I wold thy father were a king  
 Thy mother layd on a beere. (63 A, 37)

The folk tradition has its own kind of pathos, which shows a complete lack of protest or of sentimentality. The Clerk's Two Sons o Owsenford, condemned to death, say to their father:

'We lie not here for owsen,\* dear father,  
 Nor yet lie here for kye,†  
 But it's for a little o dear bought love  
 Sae sair bound as we lie.' (72 A, 8)

and the same mood appears in "Mary Hamilton":

When she gaed up the Cannogate,  
 She laughd loud laughters three;  
 But whan she cam down the Cannogate  
 The tear blinded her ee. (173 A, 8)

\* Oxen.

† Cattle.

The economy with which this pathos is presented is not a literary device so much as an outlook on life; as in the coronach or lament "Bonny George Campbell":

Hie upon Hielands,  
and laigh upon Tay,  
Bonny George Campbell  
rode out on a day.

He saddled, he bridled,  
and gallant rode he,  
And hame cam his guid horse,  
but never cam he. (210 C, 1, 2)

However literary we may imagine our appreciation to be, we cannot help identifying ourselves, to some degree, with the ballads' outlook when we enjoy their poetry.

Folk tradition lies behind not only the general attitude expressed in the ballads but the kind of imagery they use. This imagery is of a peculiar kind: as I have said, there are few original figures of speech; and the effect is usually symbolic rather than decorative. I say effect, because we cannot tell if the ballad writers intended to use symbolism: it is more likely that they were referring to beliefs held quite literally by them, to a mythology once quite coherent but become fragmentary through the passage of time. The fragments work imaginatively on us as symbols, though how they do so is by no means clear. Sometimes we can see at least part of the meaning of an image, and then our response to what the symbol refers to is part of our total response to the poem; the pleasure of recognition is added to our enjoyment. Such is the case when there is a reference to Christian mythology, as in "Sir Hugh, or the Jew's Daughter" (155 C, 6):

She's gane into the Jew's garden,  
Where the grass grew lang and green;  
She powd an apple red and white,  
To wyle\* the young thing in.

\* Entice.

That is surely an allusion to the Garden of Eden, and to the Apple—little Sir Hugh is tempted by Antichrist and is punished—an allusion which greatly widens the ballad's range of meaning. (It is comparable to the more coherent allusion to Paradise in Marvell's "Garden".) But there is not much use of Christian mythology in the ballads, and where the allusion is to pagan folk mythology the literal meaning is harder to pick up. This mythology can be only imperfectly reconstructed by studying comparative folklore (some of its features are summarized in Chapter VI), but some symbols that refer to it can be partly understood. There is a moving stanza of this kind in "Tam Lin" (39 A, 5):

She had na pu'd a double rose,  
A rose but only twa,  
Till up then started young Tam Lin,  
Says, Lady, thou's pu nae mae.

Here is a folklore *motif*, of the tabu against plucking flowers; when the girl breaks the tabu, she summons a fairy lover. But we can perhaps also recognize the rose as an erotic symbol: an ancient use, dating at least from the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose* and found throughout mediæval poetry and folksong. The stanza is moving because of the concealed use of the symbol, as in Blake's wonderful lyric, "O Rose thou art sick". In "The Wife of Usher's Well" (79 A, 5, 6) there is another striking image which has a symbolic effect:

It fell about the Martinmass,  
When nights are lang and mirk,  
The carlin wife's three sons came hame,  
And their hats were o the birk.

It neither grew in syke nor ditch,  
Nor yet in ony sheugh;  
But at the gates of Paradise,  
That birk grew fair eneugh.

From folklore we can learn that the birch was a sacred tree and must at one time have had an aura of magic for the ballad-

singers; but here, too, the image has a wider meaning: as Coulton says, the birk is "the familiar tree of their own native valley, the earliest to come out in real splendour of spring green, and therefore a tree mystical in its significance",<sup>4</sup> and it also makes a poignant contrast with the wife's dead sons who have returned from the grave.

However much of the force of ballad imagery comes from our apprehension of its meaning, a great deal nevertheless comes from the very fact that the meaning is not clearly understood at all. The folklore of the ballads is, as I have said, fragmentary: in the course of transmission gaps have appeared and the "key" has been lost. We are often left with a series of brilliant and obscure images, which as we try to understand them set up imaginative reverberations. There may be a parallel in the effect of some of the "symboliste" poetry of the nineteenth century. One of the most famous of French lyrics, Gerard de Nerval's "El Desdichado"—

Je suis le ténébreux, le veuf, l'inconsolé,  
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie—

is also one of the most recondite. The literal meaning, which Nerval intended, has been worked out only in the last few years (in terms of alchemy and the Tarot pack), yet for a hundred years it has been sincerely admired. Clearly the poem is imaginatively effective without its key. Nerval was a great amateur of folksong and may have wished to imitate the characteristic combination of clear construction and obscure imagery. Rimbaud may have done the same: he seems to have concealed an occult and cabbalistic philosophy in the apparently naïve strophes of "Chanson de la plus haute tour", of "O Saisons, O châteaux", and of:

Elle est retrouvée.  
Quoi? l'éternité.  
C'est la mer allée  
Avec le soleil.

Rimbaud's meaning, too, has only recently become apparent;

but his poetry has been enjoyed throughout a variety of interpretations.<sup>5</sup>

The nature of this symbolic imagery can be seen better in complete poems than in short extracts. A similar cluster of images appears in each of the following; it is not certain whether there is any real historical connection between them; the only common factor may be the working of the folk imagination, which here appears at its best. The first is the famous "Corpus Christi", usually called a carol but allowed to be a ballad by some critics. It is one of the few lyrics found both in a mediæval manuscript and also in modern folk tradition.<sup>6</sup> I give the mediæval and the Derbyshire versions (the latter noted together with its tune by R. Vaughan Williams). Both are obscure, but both are of a high imaginative order: the apparently arbitrary succession of vivid images gives them a remarkable and dream-like quality.

## I

Lully, lulley, lully, lulley  
The faucon hath borne my mak\* away

He bare hym up, he bare hym down,  
He bare hym into an orchard brown.

In that orchard there was a hall,  
That was hanged with purpill and pall.

And in that hall ther was a bede,  
Hit was hanged with gold so rede.

And in that bed ther lythe a knyght,  
His wounde bledyng day and nyght.

By that bedes side ther kneleth a may,  
And she wepeth both night and day.

And by that beddes side ther stondeth a ston,  
Corpus Christi wretyn thereon.

\* Mate.

## II

Down in yon forest there stands a hall:  
*The bells of Paradise I heard them ring.*  
 It's covered all over with purple and pall:  
*And I love my Lord Jesus above anything.*

In that hall there stands a bed:  
 It's covered all over with scarlet so red:

At the bedside there lies a stone:  
 Which the sweet Virgin Mary knelt upon:

Under that bed there runs a flood:  
 The one half runs water, the other half blood:

At the foot of the bed there grows a thorn:  
 Which ever blows blossom since he was born:

Over the bed the moon shines bright:  
 Denoting our Saviour was born this night:



An interpretation of this song has been worked out in terms of the Grail legend.<sup>7</sup> Joseph of Arimathea collected Christ's blood in the Grail vessel and bore it to Avalon (first version, stanza 1, "He bare hym up"). The hall is the Castle of the Grail; the bed is the couch of the wounded keeper of the Grail or the Maimed King; and allegorically, the altar on which Christ's body is consecrated. The "red" of II is



the proper liturgical colour. The "may" is probably the maiden who serves the Grail by weeping; in II, the Virgin Mary is substituted because of the common picture in mediæval literature of the Virgin weeping for her Son. The stone in I is the paten of the Eucharist, and a symbol of the stone sealing Christ's sepulchre. In II, there is a reference to the Glastonbury Thorn, which according to local legend, is Joseph of Arimathea's staff planted in the ground. Miss Gilchrist thinks it is likely that a non-religious song underlies the mediæval version, and that the Grail symbols were introduced by a pious adapter, perhaps to popularize the cult of Corpus Christi. Whatever the explanation, there is no doubt that this range of symbols has great imaginative force, as Mr. Eliot has also shown by his use of the Grail legend in "The Waste Land".

The "bed" and the flood around it also appear in a memorable French folksong, in which the symbols have lost their religious connotation and have been adapted to the nostalgic celebration of "un petit cordonnier Qui a eu la préférence". It is the second part of "Sur les marches du palais".<sup>8</sup>

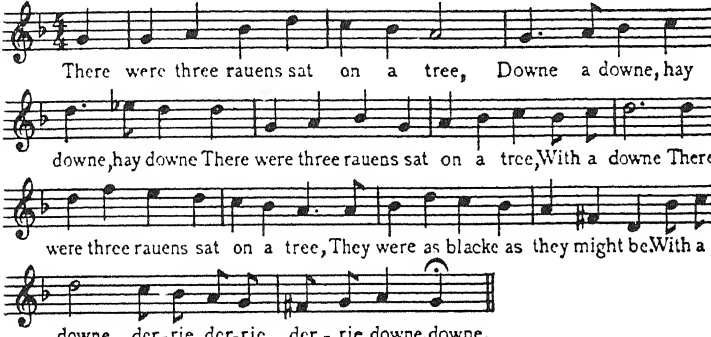


1. Ma belle, si tu voulais  
nous dormirions ensemble
2. Dans un beau lit carré,  
couvert de taies blanches;

3. Aux quatre coins du lit  
un bouquet de pervenches.
4. Dans le mitan du lit  
la rivière est profonde;
5. Tous les chevaux du roi  
y viennent boire ensemble.
6. Et là, nous dormirions  
jusqu'à la fin du monde.

M. Davenson comments on its mysterious poetry: "the 'rivière profonde' of evident symbolical weight, calls up the bare sword which separates Tristan from Yseult in their mystic bed; and Wagner's Tristan is brought to mind by the last verse: *Liebestod*, consummation of love in death the liberator, escape from a world ruled by evil".

Still another ballad seems to draw its imaginative force from a similar complex of symbols, "The Three Ravens" (26). This version is a seventeenth-century song of the broadside type<sup>9</sup>; which from internal evidence seems to be descended from a mediæval ballad.



The musical notation is written on four staves in a single system. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is simple and folk-like, with some syncopation. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words split across lines. The final line of the song, 'downe der-rie, der-rie, der - rie, downe, downe.', is written below the fourth staff.

There were three rauens sat on a tree, Downe a downe, hay  
downe, hay downe There were three rauens sat on a tree, With a downe There  
were three rauens sat on a tree, They were as blacke as they might be. With a  
downe der-rie, der-rie, der - rie, downe, downe.

1. There were three ravens sat on a tree,  
They were as blacke as they might be.

2. The one of them said to his mate,  
'Where shall we our breakefast take?'
3. 'Downe in yonder greene field,  
There lies a knight slain under his shield.
4. 'His houndes they lie downe at his feete,  
So well they can their master keepe.
5. 'His haukes they flie so eagerly,  
There's no fowle dare him come nie.'
6. Downe ther comes a fallow doe  
As great with yong as she might goe.
7. She lift up his bloudy hed  
And kist his woundes that were so red.
8. She got him up upon her backe,  
And carried him to earthen lake.
9. She buried him before the prime,  
She was dead herself ere even-song time.
10. God send every gentleman  
Such haukes, such houndes and such a leman.

Here again is the dying knight with his red wounds; the hounds remind one of the Staffordshire version of Corpus Christi:

At that bed's foot there lies a hound  
which is licking the blood that daily runs down.

The point of the story has been lost: a magical transformation of a maiden into a deer lies in the background but has become suppressed: perhaps it was originally like "Leesome Brand" (15 A, 28—"Be sure ye touch not the white hynde, For she is o the woman kind"). "Earthen lake" is archaic ("pit"), and there are obvious gaps. There remains an evocation of that

intuitive sympathy between man and nature which is characteristic of the ballads' folklore; and the identification of love with death that Davenson sees in "Sur les marches du palais" is expressed with tenderness and dignity.

Because of the way these symbols are handled, this fragment is, to me, much more moving than the parallel version, "The Twa Corbies", with which it is often compared. Here the hints of the supernatural have disappeared, and what is left is a clever, dramatic lyric.

1. As I was walking all alane.  
I heard two corbies making a mane;  
The tane unto the t'other say,  
'Where sall we gang and dine today?'
2. 'In behint yon auld fail dyke,  
I wot there lies a new slain knight;  
And naebody kens that he lies there,  
But his hawk, his hound, and lady fair.
3. 'His hound is to the hunting gane,  
His hawk to fetch the wild-fowl hame,  
His lady's ta'en another mate,  
So we may mak our dinner sweet.
4. 'Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,  
And I'll pike out his bonny blue een;  
Wi ae lock o his gowden hair  
We'll theek our nest when it grows bare.
5. 'Mony a one for him makes mane,  
But nane sall ken where he is gane;  
Oer his white banes, when they are bare,  
The wind sall blow for evermair.'

It is from Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Scott said that it had been "communicated by C. Sharpe, as written down from tradition by a lady", but it is poorly supported by folk-tradition. For that reason and from internal evidence it is likely that the version is largely

of Scott's making. It has become a narrative of domestic tragedy, with the story partially concealed: the lady herself must have murdered the knight before taking another mate. The ballad common-places, "white hause-bane", "bonny blue een", and "gowden hair", are brought in with skill and in fact rather too neatly. The last stanza, a powerful elegiac coda, is based not so much on the intuitive sympathy with nature as on a pathetic fallacy in the manner of literary Romanticism: the hawk and the hound have gone out on their business and in the finely conceived last couplet, the wind blows for ever about the knight's bones. No one but an antiquarian purist could object to this reshaping by Scott, since the result is a ballad by any standards and it is good poetry. Scott was one of the few learned poets who could write brilliantly in the ballad manner, as "Proud Maisie." and some of his other signed work proves. Nevertheless "The Three Ravens" in this reshaping has lost the quality it shared with "Corpus Christi": instead of a rich symbolism, it has only brilliant pictorial imagery: almost everything is on the surface.

Throughout Child's collection there is a good deal of sophisticated poetry of this kind. It appears in one of the earliest ballad texts, "Robin Hood and the Monk" (1119), which opens like any courtly lyric of the Middle Ages: as in the troubadour's poetry and at the beginning of the *Canterbury Tales*, the spring season is first described, then the renewal of the trees, then the birds, and finally by a kind of pathetic fallacy, human beings.

In somer when the shawes be sheyne,  
 And leves be large and long,  
 Hit is full merry in feyre foreste  
 To here the foulys song:

To se the dere draw to the dale  
 And leve the hilles hee,  
 And shadow hem in the leves grene,  
 Under the grene-wode tre.

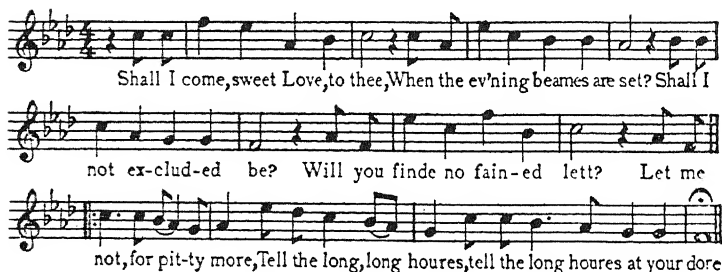
There are few more beautiful lines in the ballads than these, but they lack the essential quality of folk poetry, and stand as an isolated mediæval lyric. On the other hand, the true folk-poetry is often scattered and fugitive, appearing momentarily in otherwise dull ballads. The height of the ballad art is reached when this imaginative beauty of folk-tradition is caught and fixed by skilled poets, poets able to keep the essentials of tradition and unite them with the literary graces. In Chapter V I shall suggest how this happened and how the great versions of the classic ballads came to life.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MUSIC OF THE BALLADS

THE ballads are incomplete without music. They cannot achieve their full effect unless they are sung to their own particular tunes, and they cannot be understood historically unless their relationship to music is understood. This may be a truism, but it is one worth repeating because few readers of the English ballads have ever listened to the music. Despite the wonderful narrative technique of the ballads and their occasional richness of symbolism, they are relatively thin in poetic texture, but their musical setting adds considerably to their richness and profundity. It is the same with Campion's lyrics: when read they appear thin, at least in comparison with Donne's poetry, but taken together with the melodies Campion wrote for them, they are complete and moving works of art. "Shall I come sweet love to thee?" has a simple and conventional text:

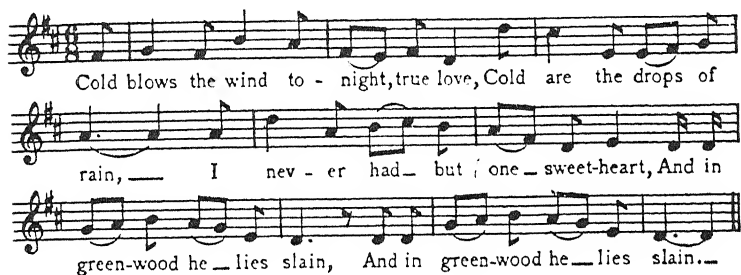
Shall I come, sweet Love, to thee  
When the eu'ning beames are set;  
Shall I not excluded be,  
Will you find no fained lett?  
Let me not for pittie more  
Tell the long hours at your dore.<sup>1</sup>



The musical notation is written on three staves in a single system. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in a soprano-like range. The lyrics are aligned under the notes: "Shall I come, sweet Love, to thee, When the ev'ning beames are set? Shall I not ex-clud-ed be? Will you finde no fain-ed lett? Let me not, for pit-ty more, Tell the long, long houres, tell the long houres at your dore." The final note of the third staff is a half note with a fermata.

The perfect interaction of the music with the words, the repetition of the last line and of the word "long" within that line, the pause on the third repetition of that word, and the three falling cadences at the end of the stanza transforms the poem into an intense expression of timidity and desire. The jingling trochees (Shall I come, sweet love to thee) disappear; when sung, every phrase of the poem begins with two light syllables and there are only two main stresses to each of the first five lines. As a writer of verse for speaking, Campion is only a minor figure; as a writer of "words for music", he is a great artist.

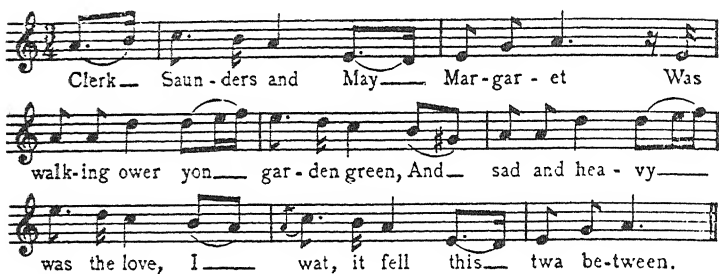
I do not suggest that even the best ballads can show the craftsmanship of Campion's work, or such felicitous matching of sound with sense. But many of the ballad settings seem exactly right for the sense of the words, and the beauty of the music transforms those words into a more intense expression of feeling. "The Unquiet Grave" (78), for example, in a setting collected by Sharp,<sup>2</sup> is changed from a rather simple expression of pathos into an eloquent threnody. Here too, there is a significant repetition which does not appear in the printed texts, and here again, the words when sung fall into a smoother rhythm than when they are simply read.



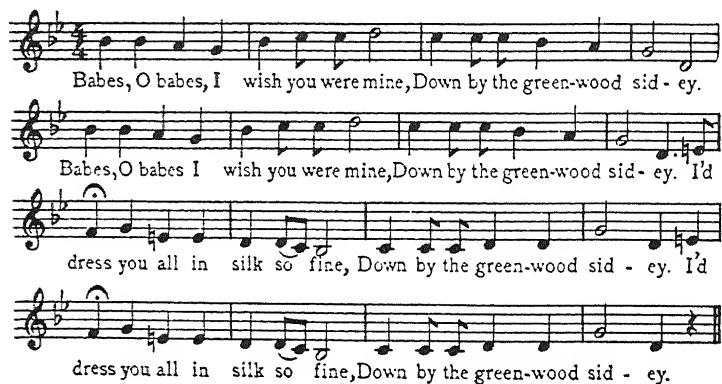
It will be seen from some of the tunes I have already quoted how much the music adds to the effect of the words: in particular, the tune of "Six Dukes Went A-fishing" (Chapter I), and that of "Corpus Christi" (Chapter II); and how appro-



priate to the violence and tenderness of "Clerk Saunders" is this setting<sup>3</sup>:



Although ballad music and words make up an indivisible whole, many of the tunes can stand alone and have great beauty. In folksong collected during the last three-quarters of a century, the tunes are on the whole better than the words. For example, the tune of "Still Growing" given in Chapter I has an exquisite melody, while the text collected with it is corrupt and in places nonsensical. Ballad texts collected after the early nineteenth century are often degenerate, and that is particularly true of modern American versions where the texture of the verse is usually thin and poor. Yet their melodies are impressive. One of the versions of "The Cruel Mother" (20)



that Sharp collected in the Appalachians<sup>4</sup> has a doggerel text and makes sad reading beside the eighteenth-century Scottish version quoted in Chapter II; the tune is of a very different order, and is one of those capable, as Sharp says, of "standing alone, divorced from their texts and of being played or sung as absolute music"<sup>5</sup>:

The historical study of the ballad is also incomplete if it makes no reference to the music. The ballads are transmitted orally by means of song, and although collectors have taken down a few versions from recitation only, it seems certain that in these cases the informants learned their words from other people's singing. Music is a powerful aid to memory, and without it there can be no tradition of oral poetry. It is generally accepted that ballads have always been sung, except at the very end of their history. The study of ballad music helps to explain a number of problems, including that of ballad structure and metre and the process of variation. It is therefore unfortunate that so many of the early collectors and scholars neglected music almost entirely. Percy and Scott were hardly interested, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a great many tunes were allowed to disappear, while those that were collected were often seriously altered. There are very few reliable records of folksong dating from before the 1880's. Since then, many excellent collections have appeared, but the detailed study of this material has scarcely begun. There have been almost no scholars combining enough musical and literary knowledge to discuss the music and words of the ballads together. Most students of literature, like myself, have not the qualifications for discussing the music more than cursorily. What follows is no more than a sketchy outline.

Ballad music, like other folk music, sounds strange to anyone familiar only with "art" music. It differs from the latter in three ways: it is unaccompanied (monodic), without harmony or counterpoint (homophonic), and it is based not on the chromatic scale but on the modes. It is above all the modal character of folk music that gives it its strangeness and its peculiar charm.

The modes are a series of scales which form a framework

for the melodic line.<sup>6</sup> For practical purposes there are six modes: the Ionian (or Do-mode), the Dorian (Re-), the Phrygian (Mi-), the Lydian (Fa-), the Mixolydian (Sol-), and the Æolian (or La-Mode).<sup>7</sup> They can be found by playing eight consecutive notes on the piano as follows:

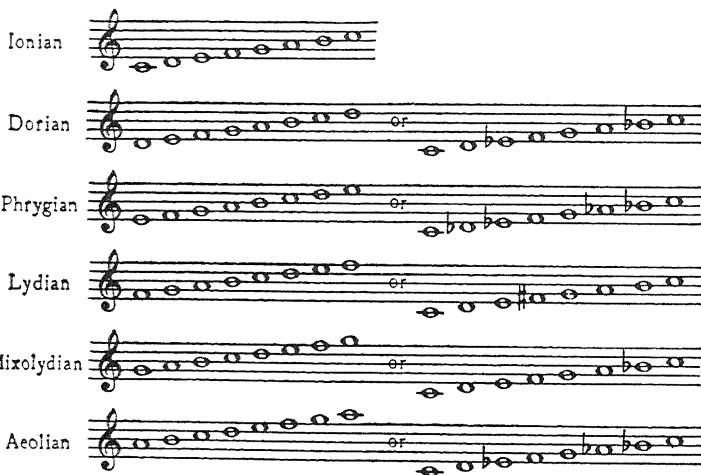
the Ionian starts from C (and is the normal major scale);  
the Dorian starts from D (it has therefore a flat third and seventh);

the Phrygian from E (it has a flat second, third, sixth, and seventh);

the Lydian from F (it has a sharp fourth);

the Mixolydian from G (it has a flat seventh);

the Æolian from A (it has a flat third, sixth, and seventh).



Folksingers in Britain and in America are fondest of the Ionian mode. They also use the Æolian, the Dorian, and the Mixolydian a good deal; the Phrygian rarely, and the Lydian scarcely at all.

Of the tunes I have quoted, "The Unquiet Grave" is

Ionian; "Still Growing" is Dorian, and so are both versions of "The Cruel Mother" (though the first version has a sharp seventh, possibly added by the editor); the version of "Clerk Saunders", given above on page 48, is Æolian. The following are examples of the Mixolydian<sup>8</sup> respectively:



The modes found in English folksong resemble those of Gregorian plainsong, but they are probably not derived from the latter. In French folksong, some borrowings from plainsong have been traced: the most famous of all mediæval melodies, the "Dies Iræ", is parodied in a sorcerer's song, and a beautiful Dorian setting of "Le Roi Renaud" (a ballad related to our "Clerk Colville") is adapted from the "Ave Maris Stella".<sup>9</sup>



I know of no such borrowings in English folksong. It seems likely that the modes used in folksong arose independently

the camera set-up" ("neerer) view"; then he moves forward until in a close-up you can read the boastful argument on the shields. Finally, he moves back again to give a general view of the banded powers of Satan. This rapid change of focus occurs throughout *Paradise Lost*: Eisenstein lays out other passages in this way, as if he were preparing to film them, and his approach helps to explain some of the complexity and power of Milton's narrative.

Eisenstein's analysis can be applied to the ballads: they tell their stories so well because they use this device of montage. They present the narrative not as a continuous sequence of events but as a series of rapid flashes, and their art lies in the selection and juxtaposition of these flashes. Montage appears not only in the general lay-out but also in the conventional links describing movement:

He's throw the dark and throw the mark\*  
And throw the leaves o green.

and even in the commonplace

He hadna gone a mile, a mile,  
A mile but barely three

—which is perhaps a very tight compression of three shots. (He is three miles away before the next part of the story begins.)†

This technique is beautifully applied in the finest version of "Sir Patrick Spens" (58 A, from Percy's *Reliques*):

1. The king sits in Dumferling toune,  
Drinking the blude-reid wine:  
'O whar will I get guid sailor  
To sail this schip of mine?'

\* Through the murk.

† Ballad narrative may also be compared to the strip-cartoon; or, as Steenstrup says, to the Bayeux Tapestry, with its way of leading the eye from well-defined scene to scene.

2. Up and spak an eldern knicht,  
Sat at the kings richt kne:  
'Sir Patrick Spence is the best sailor  
That sails upon the se.'
3. The king has written a braid letter,  
And signd it wi his hand,  
And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence,  
Was walking on the sand.
4. The first line that Sir Patrick red,  
A loud lauch lauched he;  
The next line that Sir Patrick red,  
The teir blinded his ee.
5. 'O wha is this has don this deid  
This ill deid don to me,  
To send me out this time o' the yeir,  
To sail upon the se!
6. 'Mak hast, mak haste, my mirry men all,  
Our guid schip sails the morne:'  
'O say na sae, my master deir,  
For I feir a deadlie storme.
7. 'Late late yestreen I saw the new moone,  
Wi the auld moone in hir arme,  
And I feir, I feir, my deir master,  
That we will cum to harme.'
8. O our Scots nobles wer richt laith  
To weet their cork-heild schoone;  
Bot lang owre a' the play wer playd,  
Thair hats they swam aboone.
9. O lang, lang may their ladies sit  
Wi thair fans into their hand  
Or eir they se Sir Patrick Spence  
Cum sailing to the land.

10. O lang, lang may the ladies stand,  
 Wi thair gold kems in their hair,  
 Waiting for thair ain deir lords,  
 For they'll se thame na mair.
11. Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,  
 It's fiftie fadom deip,  
 And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence,  
 Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

There is a classic example of montage in the third stanza, with its rapid jump:

And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence  
 Was walking on the sand.

Sir Patrick's character is revealed by the two shots of the fourth stanza. In the next three stanzas, the tension is rapidly worked up by the dialogue between Sir Patrick and the sailor: one vivid image of a natural portent is enough to create a sense of doom. The disaster is scarcely pictured at all; instead we get an ironic comment on the behaviour of the noble lords as the ship founders and a rapid and highly imaginative shot of their hats bobbing about on the water. The full force of the disaster is brought out by the transition to the shore: two grave and formal stanzas in parallel describe the ladies with their fans and their combs, emblems of wealth and station. At this point the ballad has moved away from pure narrative to lyrical comment; but there is a change back to direct visualization in the last stanza, which gives only a still shot of the sea as an elegy:

Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour  
 It's fiftie fadom deip,  
 And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence  
 Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

The ballads lack the elaborate counterpoint of image against metrical pattern which Eisenstein sees in Milton, but they

have a kind of counterpoint of their own. The story moves forward in bounds, against a background of regular stanzaic melody and against the formal patterning of folk art: the repetitions in threes and sevens and the conventional phrases. The rapidity and violence of the action is all the more striking because of the decorum and formality maintained in the ballads. Gummere has well described their movement as "leaping and lingering".

The main end of the ballads is to present the story dramatically, and therefore explanation, moralist comment, and even original phraseology are suppressed. Unconventional metaphors are rare, perhaps because they might hold up the narrative. There are not many things in the ballads like this beautiful stanza from "The Gay Goshawk" (96 E 6):

The red that is in my love's cheek  
Is like blood spilt among the snaw;  
The white that is on her breast-bone  
Is like the down on the white sea-maw.\*

or this from "Willie and Lady Maisry" (70 A, 8):

With her feet as white as sleet  
She strode her bower within,  
And with her fingers long and small  
She's looten Sweet Willie in.

The ballads use their own peculiar rhetoric and poetic diction to increase the dramatic pressure. Phrases like "He hadna gone a mile, a mile . . ." or "He bent his bow and swam" or "The up and spoke the little foot-page", and conventional epithets like "the gold so red" or "the wan water" are constantly found. The ballads are sternly economical in their vocabulary. They use the Homeric epithet for much the same reason as Homer is said to have used it: to avoid distraction from the story-telling.<sup>2</sup> The listeners can rest on the familiar and repeated epithets and so concentrate the better on the working-out of the plot.



Another rhetorical device is "parallelism in phrase and idea", as Gerould calls it, and the favourite way of developing this parallelism is by incremental repetition. Each stanza repeats the one before it, but with some addition which leads on to the climax. The "nuncupative testament" which appears in several ballads, shows this device built into the structure of the story. In "The Cruel Brother" (11 A) the murdered bride names her heirs in turn:

21. 'O what will you leave to your father dear?'  
'The silver-shode steed that brought me here.'
22. 'What will you leave to your mother dear?'  
'My velvet pall and my silken gear.'
23. 'What will you leave to your sister Anne?'  
'My silken scarf and my gowden fan.'
24. 'What will you leave to your sister Grace?'  
'My bloody cloaths to wash and dress.'
25. 'What will you leave to your brother John?'  
'The gallows-tree to hang him on.'
26. 'What will you leave to your brother John's wife?'  
'The wilderness to end her life.'

The monotonous rocking movement of these repetitions, and the conventional gorgeousness of the silk, gold, and silver, work together to create an almost liturgical solemnity; and they help to evoke the supernatural atmosphere which is an essential part of the best ballads. Yet another device is the apparently irrelevant refrain<sup>3</sup> which intersperses the bare recital of tragic events with a rich pattern of flowers and trees: the quenching of human life is ironically contrasted with the continuity of natural life. This, too, adds to the formal, even ritualistic character of the ballads:

1. She sat down below a thorn,  
*Fine flowers in the valley*  
 And there she has her sweet babe born  
*And the green leaves they grow rarely.*

Smile na sae sweet, my bonie babe,  
 And ye smile sae sweet, ye'll smile me dead.

She's taen out her little pen-knife  
 And twinnd the sweet babe o its life.

She's howket a grave by the light o the moon  
 And there she's buried her sweet babe in.

As she was going to the church,  
 She saw a sweet babe in the porch

'O sweet babe, and thou were mine  
 I wad cleed thee in the silk so fine.

'O mother dear, when I was thine,  
*Fine flowers in the valley*  
 You did na prove to me sae kind.'  
*And the green leaves they grow rarely.*

(20 B)

The narrative technique that I have described is the distinctive feature of the ballads, but it is not the only thing that gives ballad poetry its beauty. There is also a quality which the ballads share with other folksong; it is hard to define but may be described as a penumbra of folklore or as "folk imagination". It is artificial to break the poetry of the ballads down into a number of constituents—montage, rhetoric, and diction on the one hand and folklore on the other—separating the way the ballads are constructed from the things they are about. The traditional division of poetry into form and content is even more misleading with the ballads than with more learned poetry. Formal devices do not make up the whole of the ballad æsthetic: if they did, translations of ballads into other languages might be better than they are; but even the best translations, like so many literary pastiches

of the ballads, sound curiously flat. The technical components are really effective only in their context; and that context is a special cultural and artistic tradition. The ballads are closely associated with a particular way of living and thinking; in one sense, the folklore is the poetry. I shall try to describe this way of life in later chapters; here I am concerned only with the literary effects of which it is capable.

The ballad attitude to life gives an unique note to the poetry: an impersonality, a detachment and ironic understatement which appears in Fair Annie's words:

Gin my seven sons were seven young rats,  
 Running on the castle wa,  
 And I were a grey cat mysell  
 I soon would worry them a'. (62 A, 23)

and to Fair Ellen's

She said, Lullabye, my owne deere child!  
 Lullabye, deere child, deere!  
 I wold thy father were a king  
 Thy mother layd on a beere. (63 A, 37)

The folk tradition has its own kind of pathos, which shows a complete lack of protest or of sentimentality. The Clerk's Two Sons o Owsenford, condemned to death, say to their father:

'We lie not here for owsen,\* dear father,  
 Nor yet lie here for kye,†  
 But it's for a little o dear bought love  
 Sae sair bound as we lie.' (72 A, 8)

and the same mood appears in "Mary Hamilton":

When she gaed up the Cannogate,  
 She laughd loud laughters three;  
 But whan she cam down the Cannogate  
 The tear blinded her ee. (173 A, 8)

\* Oxen.

† Cattle.

The economy with which this pathos is presented is not a literary device so much as an outlook on life; as in the coronach or lament "Bonny George Campbell":

Hie upon Hiellands,  
and laigh upon Tay,  
Bonny George Campbell  
rode out on a day.

He saddled, he bridled,  
and gallant rode he,  
And hame cam his guid horse,  
but never cam he.

(210 C, 1, 2)

However literary we may imagine our appreciation to be, we cannot help identifying ourselves, to some degree, with the ballads' outlook when we enjoy their poetry.

Folk tradition lies behind not only the general attitude expressed in the ballads but the kind of imagery they use. This imagery is of a peculiar kind: as I have said, there are few original figures of speech; and the effect is usually symbolic rather than decorative. I say effect, because we cannot tell if the ballad writers intended to use symbolism: it is more likely that they were referring to beliefs held quite literally by them, to a mythology once quite coherent but become fragmentary through the passage of time. The fragments work imaginatively on us as symbols, though how they do so is by no means clear. Sometimes we can see at least part of the meaning of an image, and then our response to what the symbol refers to is part of our total response to the poem; the pleasure of recognition is added to our enjoyment. Such is the case when there is a reference to Christian mythology, as in "Sir Hugh, or the Jew's Daughter" (155 C, 6):

She's gane into the Jew's garden,  
Where the grass grew lang and green;  
She powd an apple red and white,  
'To wyle\* the young thing in.

\* Entice.

That is surely an allusion to the Garden of Eden, and to the Apple—little Sir Hugh is tempted by Antichrist and is punished—an allusion which greatly widens the ballad's range of meaning. (It is comparable to the more coherent allusion to Paradise in Marvell's "Garden".) But there is not much use of Christian mythology in the ballads, and where the allusion is to pagan folk mythology the literal meaning is harder to pick up. This mythology can be only imperfectly reconstructed by studying comparative folklore (some of its features are summarized in Chapter VI), but some symbols that refer to it can be partly understood. There is a moving stanza of this kind in "Tam Lin" (39 A, 5):

She had na pu'd a double rose,  
A rose but only twa,  
Till up then started young Tam Lin,  
Says, Lady, thou's pu nae mae.

Here is a folklore *motif*, of the tabu against plucking flowers; when the girl breaks the tabu, she summons a fairy lover. But we can perhaps also recognize the rose as an erotic symbol: an ancient use, dating at least from the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose* and found throughout mediæval poetry and folksong. The stanza is moving because of the concealed use of the symbol, as in Blake's wonderful lyric, "O Rose thou art sick". In "The Wife of Usher's Well" (79 A, 5, 6) there is another striking image which has a symbolic effect:

It fell about the Martinmass,  
When nights are lang and mirk,  
The carlin wife's three sons came hame,  
And their hats were o the birk.

It neither grew in syke nor ditch,  
Nor yet in ony sheugh;  
But at the gates of Paradise,  
That birk grew fair eneugh.

From folklore we can learn that the birch was a sacred tree and must at one time have had an aura of magic for the ballad-

singers; but here, too, the image has a wider meaning: as Coulton says, the birk is "the familiar tree of their own native valley, the earliest to come out in real splendour of spring green, and therefore a tree mystical in its significance",<sup>4</sup> and it also makes a poignant contrast with the wife's dead sons who have returned from the grave.

However much of the force of ballad imagery comes from our apprehension of its meaning, a great deal nevertheless comes from the very fact that the meaning is not clearly understood at all. The folklore of the ballads is, as I have said, fragmentary: in the course of transmission gaps have appeared and the "key" has been lost. We are often left with a series of brilliant and obscure images, which as we try to understand them set up imaginative reverberations. There may be a parallel in the effect of some of the "symboliste" poetry of the nineteenth century. One of the most famous of French lyrics, Gerard de Nerval's "El Desdichado"—

Je suis le ténébreux, le veuf, l'inconsolé,  
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie—

is also one of the most recondite. The literal meaning, which Nerval intended, has been worked out only in the last few years (in terms of alchemy and the Tarot pack), yet for a hundred years it has been sincerely admired. Clearly the poem is imaginatively effective without its key. Nerval was a great amateur of folksong and may have wished to imitate the characteristic combination of clear construction and obscure imagery. Rimbaud may have done the same: he seems to have concealed an occult and cabbalistic philosophy in the apparently naïve strophes of "Chanson de la plus haute tour", of "O Saisons, O châteaux", and of:

Elle est retrouvée.  
Quoi? l'éternité.  
C'est la mer allée  
Avec le soleil.

Rimbaud's meaning, too, has only recently become apparent;

but his poetry has been enjoyed throughout a variety of interpretations.<sup>5</sup>

The nature of this symbolic imagery can be seen better in complete poems than in short extracts. A similar cluster of images appears in each of the following; it is not certain whether there is any real historical connection between them; the only common factor may be the working of the folk imagination, which here appears at its best. The first is the famous "Corpus Christi", usually called a carol but allowed to be a ballad by some critics. It is one of the few lyrics found both in a mediæval manuscript and also in modern folk tradition.<sup>6</sup> I give the mediæval and the Derbyshire versions (the latter noted together with its tune by R. Vaughan Williams). Both are obscure, but both are of a high imaginative order: the apparently arbitrary succession of vivid images gives them a remarkable and dream-like quality.

# I

Lully, lulley, lully, lulley  
The faucon hath borne my mak\* away

He bare hym up, he bare hym down,  
He bare hym into an orchard brown.

In that orchard there was a hall,  
That was hanged with purpill and pall.

And in that hall ther was a bede,  
Hit was hanged with gold so rede.

And in that bed ther lythe a knyght,  
His wounde bledyng day and nyght.

By that bedes side ther kneleth a may,  
And she wepeth both night and day.

And by that beddes side ther stondeth a ston,  
Corpus Christi wretyn thereon.

\* Mate.

## II

Down in yon forest there stands a hall:  
*The bells of Paradise I heard them ring.*  
 It's covered all over with purple and pall:  
*And I love my Lord Jesus above anything.*

In that hall there stands a bed:  
 It's covered all over with scarlet so red:

At the bedside there lies a stone:  
 Which the sweet Virgin Mary knelt upon:

Under that bed there runs a flood:  
 The one half runs water, the other half blood:

At the foot of the bed there grows a thorn:  
 Which ever blows blossom since he was born:

Over the bed the moon shines bright:  
 Denoting our Saviour was born this night:



An interpretation of this song has been worked out in terms of the Grail legend.<sup>7</sup> Joseph of Arimathea collected Christ's blood in the Grail vessel and bore it to Avalon (first version, stanza 1, "He bare hym up"). The hall is the Castle of the Grail; the bed is the couch of the wounded keeper of the Grail or the Maimed King; and allegorically, the altar on which Christ's body is consecrated. The "red" of II is



the proper liturgical colour. The "may" is probably the maiden who serves the Grail by weeping; in II, the Virgin Mary is substituted because of the common picture in mediæval literature of the Virgin weeping for her Son. The stone in I is the paten of the Eucharist, and a symbol of the stone sealing Christ's sepulchre. In II, there is a reference to the Glastonbury Thorn, which according to local legend, is Joseph of Arimathea's staff planted in the ground. Miss Gilchrist thinks it is likely that a non-religious song underlies the mediæval version, and that the Grail symbols were introduced by a pious adapter, perhaps to popularize the cult of Corpus Christi. Whatever the explanation, there is no doubt that this range of symbols has great imaginative force, as Mr. Eliot has also shown by his use of the Grail legend in "The Waste Land".

The "bed" and the flood around it also appear in a memorable French folksong, in which the symbols have lost their religious connotation and have been adapted to the nostalgic celebration of "un petit cordonnier Qui a eu la préférence". It is the second part of "Sur les marches du palais".<sup>8</sup>

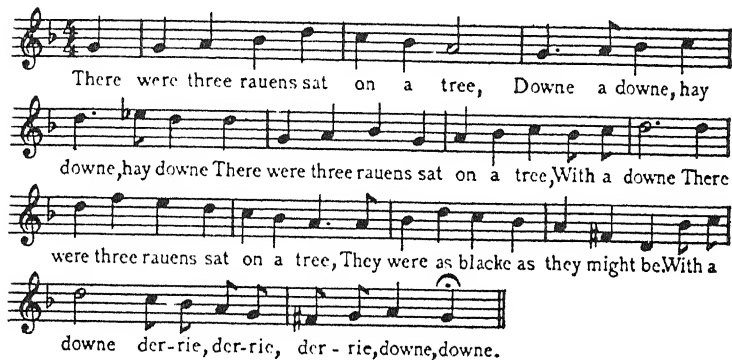


1. Ma belle, si tu voulais  
nous dormirions ensemble
2. Dans un beau lit carré,  
couvert de taies blanches;

3. Aux quatre coins du lit  
un bouquet de pervenches.
4. Dans le mitan du lit  
la rivière est profonde;
5. Tous les chevaux du roi  
y viennent boire ensemble.
6. Et là, nous dormirions  
jusqu'à la fin du monde.

M. Davenson comments on its mysterious poetry: "the 'rivière profonde' of evident symbolical weight, calls up the bare sword which separates Tristan from Yseult in their mystic bed; and Wagner's Tristan is brought to mind by the last verse: *Liebestod*, consummation of love in death the liberator, escape from a world ruled by evil".

Still another ballad seems to draw its imaginative force from a similar complex of symbols, "The Three Ravens" (26). This version is a seventeenth-century song of the broadside type<sup>9</sup>; which from internal evidence seems to be descended from a mediæval ballad.



The image shows a musical score for the song 'The Three Ravens'. It consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff contains the first line of the song. The second staff contains the second line. The third staff contains the third line. The fourth staff contains the fourth line. The lyrics are: 'There were three rauens sat on a tree, Downe a downe, hay downe, hay downe There were three rauens sat on a tree, With a downe There were three rauens sat on a tree, They were as blacke as they might be. With a downe der-rie, der-rie, der-rie, downe, downe.'

There were three rauens sat on a tree, Downe a downe, hay  
downe, hay downe There were three rauens sat on a tree, With a downe There  
were three rauens sat on a tree, They were as blacke as they might be. With a  
downe der-rie, der-rie, der-rie, downe, downe.

1. There were three ravens sat on a tree,  
They were as blacke as they might be.

2. The one of them said to his mate,  
‘Where shall we our breakefast take?’
3. ‘Downe in yonder greene field,  
There lies a knight slain under his shield.
4. ‘His houndes they lie downe at his feete,  
So well they can their master keepe.
5. ‘His haukes they flie so eagerly,  
There’s no fowle dare him come nie.’
6. Downe ther comes a fallow doe  
As great with yong as she might goe.
7. She lift up his bloudy hed  
And kist his woundes that were so red.
8. She got him up upon her backe,  
And carried him to earthen lake.
9. She buried him before the prime,  
She was dead herself ere even-song time.
10. God send every gentleman  
Such haukes, such houndes and such a leman.

Here again is the dying knight with his red wounds; the hounds remind one of the Staffordshire version of Corpus Christi:

At that bed’s foot there lies a hound  
which is licking the blood that daily runs down.

The point of the story has been lost: a magical transformation of a maiden into a deer lies in the background but has become suppressed: perhaps it was originally like “Leesome Brand” (15 A, 28—“Be sure ye touch not the white hynde, For she is o the woman kind”). “Earthen lake” is archaic (“pit”), and there are obvious gaps. There remains an evocation of that

intuitive sympathy between man and nature which is characteristic of the ballads' folklore; and the identification of love with death that Davenson sees in "Sur les marches du palais" is expressed with tenderness and dignity.

Because of the way these symbols are handled, this fragment is, to me, much more moving than the parallel version, "The Twa Corbies", with which it is often compared. Here the hints of the supernatural have disappeared, and what is left is a clever, dramatic lyric.

1. As I was walking all alane.  
I heard two corbies making a mane;  
The tane unto the t'other say,  
'Where sall we gang and dine today?'
2. 'In behint yon auld fail dyke,  
I wot there lies a new slain knight;  
And naebody kens that he lies there,  
But his hawk, his hound, and lady fair.
3. 'His hound is to the hunting gane,  
His hawk to fetch the wild-fowl hame,  
His lady's ta'en another mate,  
So we may mak our dinner sweet.
4. 'Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,  
And I'll pike out his bonny blue een;  
Wi ae lock o his gowden hair  
We'll theek our nest when it grows bare.
5. 'Mony a one for him makes mane,  
But nane sall ken where he is gane;  
Oer his white banes, when they are bare,  
The wind sall blow for evermair.'

It is from Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Scott said that it had been "communicated by C. Sharpe, as written down from tradition by a lady", but it is poorly supported by folk-tradition. For that reason and from internal evidence it is likely that the version is largely

of Scott's making. It has become a narrative of domestic tragedy, with the story partially concealed: the lady herself must have murdered the knight before taking another mate. The ballad common-places, "white hause-bane", "bonny blue een", and "gowden hair", are brought in with skill and in fact rather too neatly. The last stanza, a powerful elegiac coda, is based not so much on the intuitive sympathy with nature as on a pathetic fallacy in the manner of literary Romanticism: the hawk and the hound have gone out on their business and in the finely conceived last couplet, the wind blows for ever about the knight's bones. No one but an antiquarian purist could object to this reshaping by Scott, since the result is a ballad by any standards and it is good poetry. Scott was one of the few learned poets who could write brilliantly in the ballad manner, as "Proud Maisie." and some of his other signed work proves. Nevertheless "The Three Ravens" in this reshaping has lost the quality it shared with "Corpus Christi": instead of a rich symbolism, it has only brilliant pictorial imagery: almost everything is on the surface.

Throughout Child's collection there is a good deal of sophisticated poetry of this kind. It appears in one of the earliest ballad texts, "Robin Hood and the Monk" (119), which opens like any courtly lyric of the Middle Ages: as in the troubadour's poetry and at the beginning of the *Canterbury Tales*, the spring season is first described, then the renewal of the trees, then the birds, and finally by a kind of pathetic fallacy, human beings.

In somer when the shawes be sheyne,  
 And leves be large and long,  
 Hit is full merry in feyre foreste  
 To here the foulys song:

To se the dere draw to the dale  
 And leve the hilles hee,  
 And shadow hem in the leves grene,  
 Under the grene-wode tre.

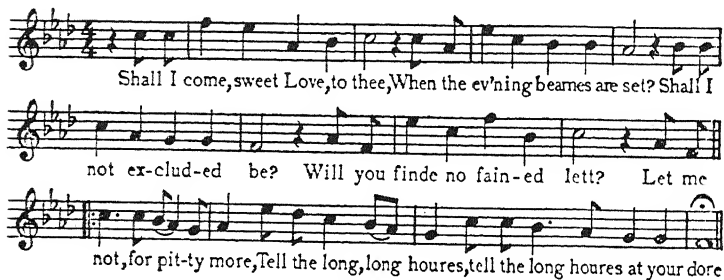
There are few more beautiful lines in the ballads than these, but they lack the essential quality of folk poetry, and stand as an isolated mediæval lyric. On the other hand, the true folk-poetry is often scattered and fugitive, appearing momentarily in otherwise dull ballads. The height of the ballad art is reached when this imaginative beauty of folk-tradition is caught and fixed by skilled poets, poets able to keep the essentials of tradition and unite them with the literary graces. In Chapter V I shall suggest how this happened and how the great versions of the classic ballads came to life.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MUSIC OF THE BALLADS

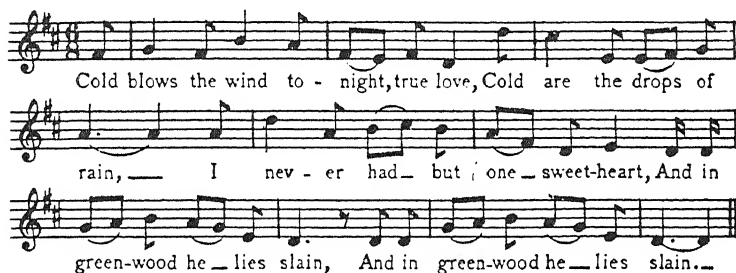
THE ballads are incomplete without music. They cannot achieve their full effect unless they are sung to their own particular tunes, and they cannot be understood historically unless their relationship to music is understood. This may be a truism, but it is one worth repeating because few readers of the English ballads have ever listened to the music. Despite the wonderful narrative technique of the ballads and their occasional richness of symbolism, they are relatively thin in poetic texture, but their musical setting adds considerably to their richness and profundity. It is the same with Campion's lyrics: when read they appear thin, at least in comparison with Donne's poetry, but taken together with the melodies Campion wrote for them, they are complete and moving works of art. "Shall I come sweet love to thee?" has a simple and conventional text:

Shall I come, sweet Love, to thee  
When the eu'ning beames are set;  
Shall I not excluded be,  
Will you find no fained lett?  
Let me not for pittty more  
Tell the long hours at your dore.<sup>1</sup>



The perfect interaction of the music with the words, the repetition of the last line and of the word "long" within that line, the pause on the third repetition of that word, and the three falling cadences at the end of the stanza transforms the poem into an intense expression of timidity and desire. The jingling trochees (Shall I come, sweet love to thee) disappear; when sung, every phrase of the poem begins with two light syllables and there are only two main stresses to each of the first five lines. As a writer of verse for speaking, Campion is only a minor figure; as a writer of "words for music", he is a great artist.

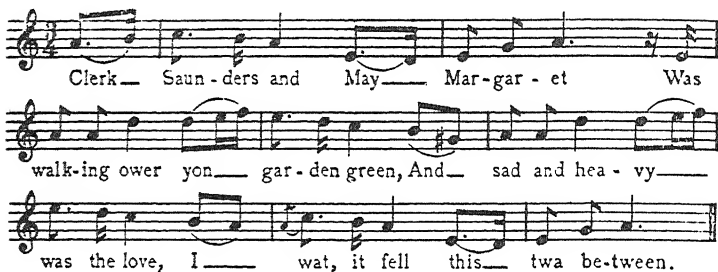
I do not suggest that even the best ballads can show the craftsmanship of Campion's work, or such felicitous matching of sound with sense. But many of the ballad settings seem exactly right for the sense of the words, and the beauty of the music transforms those words into a more intense expression of feeling. "The Unquiet Grave" (78), for example, in a setting collected by Sharp,<sup>2</sup> is changed from a rather simple expression of pathos into an eloquent threnody. Here too, there is a significant repetition which does not appear in the printed texts, and here again, the words when sung fall into a smoother rhythm than when they are simply read.



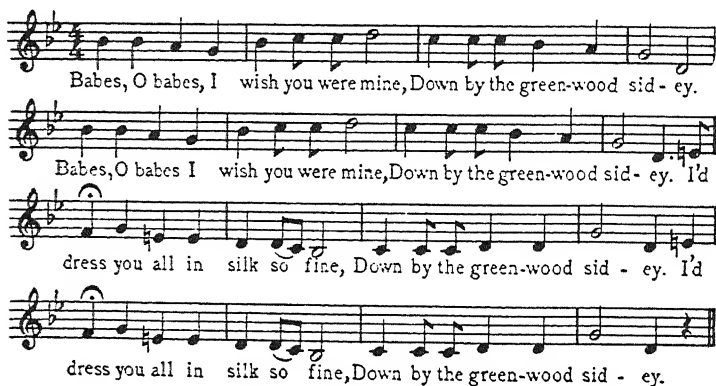
It will be seen from some of the tunes I have already quoted how much the music adds to the effect of the words: in particular, the tune of "Six Dukes Went A-fishing" (Chapter I), and that of "Corpus Christi" (Chapter II); and how appro-



priate to the violence and tenderness of "Clerk Saunders" is this setting<sup>3</sup>:



Although ballad music and words make up an indivisible whole, many of the tunes can stand alone and have great beauty. In folksong collected during the last three-quarters of a century, the tunes are on the whole better than the words. For example, the tune of "Still Growing" given in Chapter I has an exquisite melody, while the text collected with it is corrupt and in places nonsensical. Ballad texts collected after the early nineteenth century are often degenerate, and that is particularly true of modern American versions where the texture of the verse is usually thin and poor. Yet their melodies are impressive. One of the versions of "The Cruel Mother" (20)



that Sharp collected in the Appalachians<sup>4</sup> has a doggerel text and makes sad reading beside the eighteenth-century Scottish version quoted in Chapter II; the tune is of a very different order, and is one of those capable, as Sharp says, of "standing alone, divorced from their texts and of being played or sung as absolute music"<sup>5</sup>:

The historical study of the ballad is also incomplete if it makes no reference to the music. The ballads are transmitted orally by means of song, and although collectors have taken down a few versions from recitation only, it seems certain that in these cases the informants learned their words from other people's singing. Music is a powerful aid to memory, and without it there can be no tradition of oral poetry. It is generally accepted that ballads have always been sung, except at the very end of their history. The study of ballad music helps to explain a number of problems, including that of ballad structure and metre and the process of variation. It is therefore unfortunate that so many of the early collectors and scholars neglected music almost entirely. Percy and Scott were hardly interested, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a great many tunes were allowed to disappear, while those that were collected were often seriously altered. There are very few reliable records of folksong dating from before the 1880's. Since then, many excellent collections have appeared, but the detailed study of this material has scarcely begun. There have been almost no scholars combining enough musical and literary knowledge to discuss the music and words of the ballads together. Most students of literature, like myself, have not the qualifications for discussing the music more than cursorily. What follows is no more than a sketchy outline.

Ballad music, like other folk music, sounds strange to anyone familiar only with "art" music. It differs from the latter in three ways: it is unaccompanied (monodic), without harmony or counterpoint (homophonic), and it is based not on the chromatic scale but on the modes. It is above all the modal character of folk music that gives it its strangeness and its peculiar charm.

The modes are a series of scales which form a framework

for the melodic line.<sup>6</sup> For practical purposes there are six modes: the Ionian (or Do-mode), the Dorian (Re-), the Phrygian (Mi-), the Lydian (Fa-), the Mixolydian (Sol-), and the Æolian (or La-Mode).<sup>7</sup> They can be found by playing eight consecutive notes on the piano as follows:

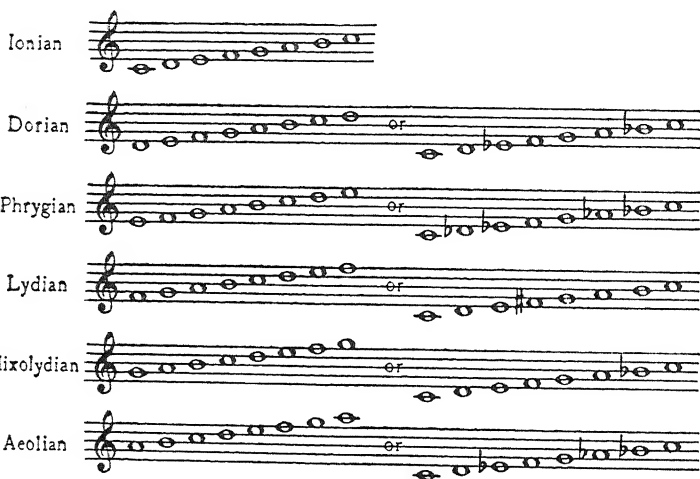
the Ionian starts from C (and is the normal major scale);  
the Dorian starts from D (it has therefore a flat third and seventh);

the Phrygian from E (it has a flat second, third, sixth, and seventh);

the Lydian from F (it has a sharp fourth);

the Mixolydian from G (it has a flat seventh);

the Æolian from A (it has a flat third, sixth, and seventh).



Folksingers in Britain and in America are fondest of the Ionian mode. They also use the Æolian, the Dorian, and the Mixolydian a good deal; the Phrygian rarely, and the Lydian scarcely at all.

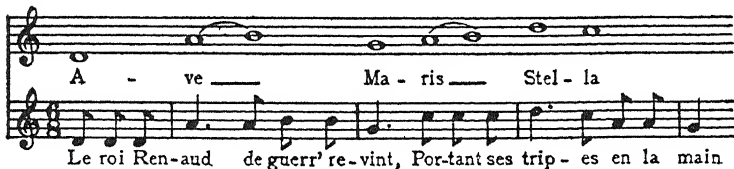
Of the tunes I have quoted, "The Unquiet Grave" is

Ionian; "Still Growing" is Dorian, and so are both versions of "The Cruel Mother" (though the first version has a sharp seventh, possibly added by the editor); the version of "Clerk Saunders", given above on page 48, is Æolian. The following are examples of the Mixolydian<sup>8</sup> respectively:

"The Grey Cock"



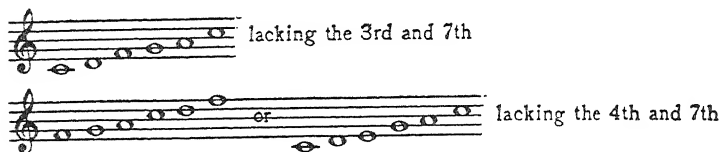
The modes found in English folksong resemble those of Gregorian plainsong, but they are probably not derived from the latter. In French folksong, some borrowings from plainsong have been traced: the most famous of all mediæval melodies, the "Dies Iræ", is parodied in a sorcerer's song, and a beautiful Dorian setting of "Le Roi Renaud" (a ballad related to our "Clerk Colville") is adapted from the "Ave Maris Stella".<sup>9</sup>



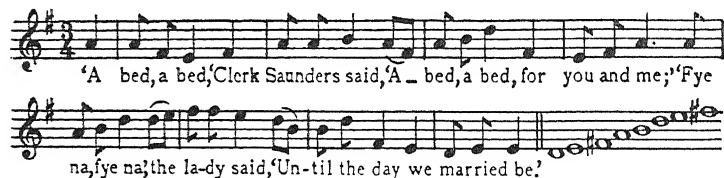
I know of no such borrowings in English folksong. It seems likely that the modes used in folksong arose independently

of Church music and that both have a common ancestor in a much more ancient system, namely, that of the primitive "gapped" scale. It is a marked characteristic of folksingers that they do not always use the full or heptatonic scale in any of the modes. They often use only six notes (hexatonic scale) or only five notes (pentatonic scale). Among the tunes given above, "The Bitter Withy" and "Six Dukes Went A-fishing" are hexatonic (they lack the seventh and could be considered as either Ionian or as Mixolydian).

There are five pentatonic scales and the two most common in English folkmusic are as follows:



Many tunes based on one or other of these systems are found in Celtic folksong and the music of Lowland Scotland influenced by it—"Auld Lang Syne" is an example, and "Loch Lomond" has only one note outside the second pentatonic scale. Here is a purely pentatonic setting of "Clerk Saunders"<sup>10</sup>:



Even in tunes which are not strictly pentatonic, the system can be seen to underlie them. Folksingers often use only five notes as the definite basic structure for these melodies and are vague about the mediate notes used to fill in the gaps. They fill in the gaps sometimes in one way, sometimes in another (e.g. the gap from sixth to tonic may be bridged by

either a major or a minor seventh). According to Sharp, the different modes have been derived from the pentatonic scales through the variety of ways in which the gaps could be filled. If the mediate notes E $\sharp$  and B $\sharp$  are inserted into the first of the pentatonic scales given above, then we have the Ionian mode; if E $\sharp$  and B $\flat$  then Mixolydian; if E $\flat$  and B $\flat$  the Dorian and so on with the other pentatonic scales. Even when the modes had been developed, "the mediate sounds remained 'weak' and were employed only as auxiliary notes or connecting links, rather than structural or cadential notes, so that the gaps, though covered up, were not concealed".<sup>11</sup>

The modes found in folkmusic are rarely complete and do not fit into the regular Gregorian system. Among tunes classified under a given mode, there are a great many varieties of melodic structure, depending on the gaps left in the scale and on the basic notes stressed. Despite this variety, all folksongs agree in having a simple melodic structure with a limited number of notes and clearly defined intervals. The modes, with their underlying pentatonic system are not simply archaic relics but have an essential function in non-accompanied, non-harmonic music. They provide the singer with a set of fixed points around which the melody oscillates, and with a set of routes by which he may return to the tonic from any note of the melody. They give the folksinger the support which harmony gives to the singer of modern "art" music, and without them he would not be able to keep in key.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, it should be said that the gapped scales and modes impose no handicap on melodic beauty and variety; as Sharp says, even the pentatonic scales have almost infinite melodic possibilities, and the best folksongs are constructed with a surprising originality and grace.

The rhythmical structure of folkmusic is intimately connected with the structure of ballad stanzas, and it therefore requires some comment. The basic unit is the *phrase*, a sequence of notes making up a melodic curve, and a strophe of folkmusic consists normally of four such phrases, corresponding to the usual four-lined word stanza. Sharp thinks that the strophe took this shape "under the controlling influence of

the metrical structure of the words",<sup>13</sup> but the converse might equally well be true. From the earliest times, the words and music of folksong have been so closely connected that it is impossible to say which came first. The four phrases are strung together in various ways to form numerous strophe patterns of which the main types are as follows<sup>14</sup>:

1. Combinations of two different phrases:  
     AABA (*e.g.* "Corpus Christi", Ch. II, page 39);  
     ABBA (*e.g.* the first of the two versions of "Clerk  
         Saunders", quoted above, page 48);  
     ABAB and occasionally AA'A''B.
2. Combinations of three different phrases:  
     AABC;  
     ABBC;  
     ABAC.
3. Combinations of four or more phrases (less common):  
     ABCD (*e.g.* "The Unquiet Grave", page 47);  
     ABCDE, etc.

From these basic combinations a large variety of strophe patterns can be built up. One phrase may echo part of another: thus, in the pattern ABAC, phrase C is sometimes constructed out of A or B. No two patterns are ever exactly alike; each has its own symmetry and contrast. The phrasal structure of folk music can show as great formal beauty and variety as the use of the modes.

The study of the music of the ballads is important for understanding the structure of the ballad stanzas, since it shows that the normal way of scanning ballad verse, as set out in books of prosody, is somewhat misleading. Classified by the number of lines and the distribution of stresses, ballad stanzas fall into a fairly large number of types. J. W. Hendren, in a dissertation on ballad rhythm,<sup>15</sup> lists twelve main varieties of stanza forms, some of them quatrains and some couplets, having three to five stresses and five to fourteen syllables in the line.

The stanza found most frequently in ballads is usually

called *Common Measure* (the standard form used in hymns). This stanza is described in works on prosody as an iambic quatrain, in which the first and third lines have eight syllables and four stresses and the second and fourth lines have six syllables and three stresses; or, in the conventional notation, 4.3.4.3. According to this analysis, a regular ballad stanza would be scanned as follows:

O wha / | is this / | has don / | this deid, |  
 This / | ill | deid don / | to me, |  
 To send / | me out / | this time / | o' the year, |  
 To sail / | upon / | the sea. |

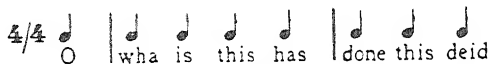
This traditional scansion ignores the fact that there are not four equal stresses in the long lines but rather two main stresses and two secondary ones; and that there are two main stresses and one secondary one in the short lines.

O wha / is this \ has don / this deid, \  
 This / ill deid \ don to me, /  
 To send / me out \ this time o' the year \  
 To sail / upon \ the sea. /

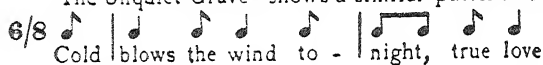
A careful analysis of the rhythm of *Common Measure* ballad lines as they sound when read aloud, would itself make this fact clear. It has been noticed by Gerould<sup>16</sup> that "the stresses fall with heavier and lighter weight in strict alternation. . . . The effect of this alternation on the ear when the verse is read, is subtly different from that of verse otherwise constituted." This analysis, as Gerould has said, is amply confirmed by the music. The tunes of *Common Measure* ballad stanzas are nearly always in compound time ( $\frac{6}{8}$  or  $\frac{4}{4}$ ) which has, of course, a main beat at the beginning and a secondary beat in the middle of the bar. The phrase to which



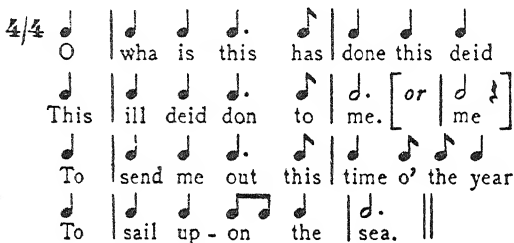
a line of the words is sung has two bars, and the metrical pattern of the first line of this "Sir Patrick Spens" may be written as follows:



"The Unquiet Grave" shows a similar pattern in 6/8 time



A study of the music also brings out another fact which is not made clear by ordinary prosody, namely, that all the lines of a Common Measure stanza are actually of equal length. Although the second and fourth lines have only three stresses, they have at the end a rest or a long note which makes them equal in time value to the first and third lines. The stanza from "Sir Patrick Spens" has the following metrical pattern in one of its tunes:



Two other characteristics of the rhythms of ballad words can incidentally be illustrated from "Sir Patrick Spens". First, there are the extra syllables that appear so often in ballad lines, which in traditional prosody are called irregular or hypermetric. The stanza above was chosen because it is almost free from them, but there is one in the third line:

To send me out this time o' the year

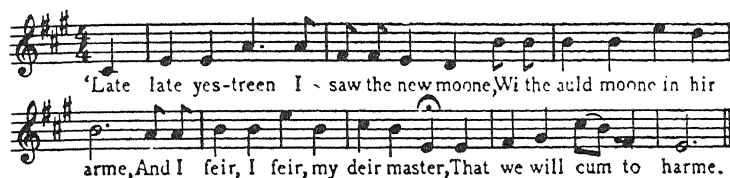
as in other stanzas:

Mak hast, mak haste, my *mirrie* men all

For I fear a deadlie storm.

These hypermetric syllables do not sound irregular when the ballad is sung; they are absorbed easily by the melody, since a long note can be divided into two short notes without any sense of strain.

Secondly, there is "wrenched" accent as in "best sailor", "a braid letter", and "deir master". It is typical of the ballads that when a dissyllable comes at the end of a line, the metrical stress goes on the second syllable, ignoring the accent of normal speech, and this convention is found in all English folksong. The rhythms of folksong do not always correspond to speech-rhythms: the English language is used almost as if it were French, in that full value may be given to normally unstressed syllables. In this respect, folksong is at variance with modern "art" song, in which the practice is to make the musical stresses correspond to the speech-stresses; it is merely a difference of convention. Folksingers apparently find wrenched accents quite natural. Both hypermetric syllables and wrenched accents appear in another stanza of "Sir Patrick Spens"<sup>17</sup>:



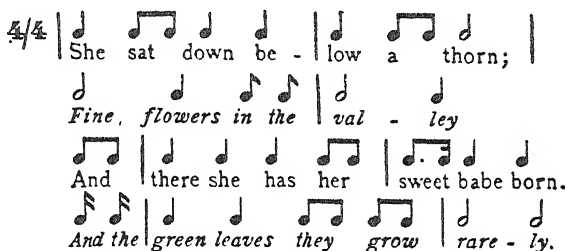
To return to the Common Measure stanza, there is another problem which ballad music may help us to solve. Since usually, the second and fourth lines alone are rhymed, it has been suggested that this stanza is really a couplet of seven-stressed lines (7.7.) rather than a quatrain (4.3.4.3.). Gerould says it is "quite certainly a couplet,"<sup>18</sup> and he supports his argument from the musical settings. He gives "a specimen chosen almost at random", a variant of "Barbara Allen" (84) from Greig's *Last Leaves*.



Gerould comments: "This is plainly an arrangement of two lines, not of four, as would be evident even without the music if our ancestors had not formed the habit of writing such patterns as quatrains." His random specimen has a phrase-pattern ABAB, a symmetrical arrangement of two repeated phrases which could, in fact, be written  $\overline{AB} \overline{B}$  or even as  $\overline{AA}$ , and so this particular example could be laid out as a couplet. But, as we have seen, ABAB is only one of many phrase patterns; it is the sole pattern which would support his argument and it is not, in fact, a particularly common one. The commoner patterns AABA, ABAC, ABCD, etc., are not symmetrical and can only be considered as combinations of four phrases, each phrase corresponding with a line of the text. Again, J. W. Hendren has pointed out<sup>19</sup> that although the main syntactical break only takes place at the end of the second and fourth lines, there is usually a minor syntactical break at the end of the first and third lines which coincides with the cadence of the melodic phrases. The tradition of printing a Common Measure stanza in four lines therefore appears in most cases to be correct.

The stanza form found most frequently after Common Measure is the couplet of four-stressed lines (4.4.); it is found in about one-third of Child's versions. There is, however, no musical form to correspond with this stanza, and as far as I know, no such form has ever been found in English or Scottish ballad music. All ballad tunes are constructed out of four distinct phrases (like AABC, ABCD) or are at least the equivalent length of a quatrain of words (like ABAB). It is almost

certain that the stanzas printed as couplets were originally quatrains with an alternating refrain (consisting of the second and fourth lines) and that this refrain has been lost. Sometimes the refrain has been preserved, as in the "Cruel Mother" (see above page 48), and the music shows the pattern quite clearly:



This version was collected for the *Scots Musical Museum*, whose editor was interested in preserving music. But presumably other early editors ignored the refrains because they were not sufficiently interested in the music to refer to it, and because they saw that the refrains were often irrelevant to the narrative. This editorial suppression accounts for the printing in couplets of ballads like "Gil Brenton" (5), "Willie's Lady" (6), and "Earl Brand" (7), in this way:

1. Did ye ever hear o guid Earl o Bran  
 An the queen's daughter o the southlan?
2. She was na fifteen years o age  
 Till she came to the Earl's bed-side.
3. 'O guid Earl o Bran, I fain wad see  
 My greyhounds run over the lea' . . . etc.

This quatrain with alternating refrain can be regarded with some likelihood as one of the more ancient forms of ballad stanza, since it probably shows a connection with mediæval dancing-song. (The soloist would sing the first and

third lines and the chorus would alternate with the refrains). It is even possible that the usual Common Measure stanza without refrain developed out of this refrain stanza, that the four-phrase pattern of ballad tunes was established by the practice of singing refrains. When this practice died out and ballad singing became a solo performance, all four phrases of the tune were used for four lines of narrative.

Another main type of ballad stanza is *Long Measure* (4.4.4.4.). When spoken, it resembles Common Measure, but the tunes to which it is sung have an entirely different musical structure; it is virtually impossible to fit Common Measure stanzas to any Long Measure tunes. The latter have their own characteristic rhythmic pattern: usually they are in  $\frac{3}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$  time; either the note corresponding to the second stressed syllable in the line is usually prolonged, as in<sup>20</sup>



or there are two short notes at the beginning of each bar, as in both versions of "Clerk Saunders" quoted above. Here the pattern is as follows:



The three surviving tunes of "Clerk Saunders" all have this pattern and it is also clearly seen in the copy of the words collected by David Herd. In Scott's version, the one which is given in the anthologies, the words have been violently forced into Common Measure and so cannot be sung to any of the tunes without a good deal of awkward and un-typical slurring:

For in may come my seven bauld brothers,  
 W' torches burning bright;  
 They'll say we hae but ae sister  
 And behold she's wi' a knight.

(Additional evidence about Scott's tampering with the text is given in Chapter V.)

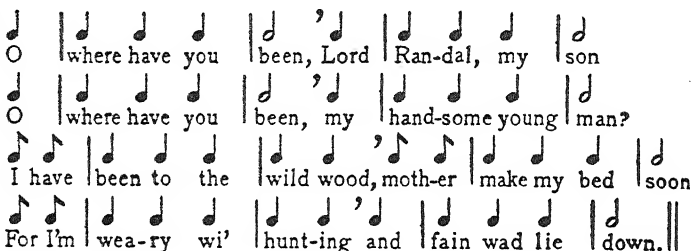
Those are the commonest types of ballad stanza-forms. There are several other types, and also a few anomalous stanza forms and metres which do not fit into any general scheme. The best way to analyse these is to relate them to the particular tunes to which they are sung. No music has been preserved for "Judas" (23), the oldest ballad text, and so its curious metre remains hard to analyse. On the other hand, the tunes of "Lord Thomas and Fair Elinor" (73), "Lord Randal", and "Lamkin" have been preserved, and they throw some light on the "irregular" metres of these well-known ballads. "Lord Thomas" is in Common Measure with a high proportion of extra syllables. The first and third lines of each stanza have an average of ten syllables, the second and fourth have an average of seven, whereas Common Measure has

6/8

Lord Thom-as he was a bold for-res-ter  
 And a chas-er of the King's deer  
 Fair El-in-or was a fair wo-man  
 And Lord Thom-as he loved her dear.

8 and 6 respectively. The tunes to which it is sung are nearly all in  $\frac{6}{8}$  time and have three short notes (quavers) in the first half of each bar; the words sound like irregular iambs when spoken, but when sung, they fit the tunes smoothly.

"Lord Randal" does not fit into any stanza type. It is superficially like Long Measure (4.4.4.4.), but most, though not all, of the metrical feet are dactylic instead of the normal iambic. Comparative study of its many tunes shows that underlying all versions there is a basic metre in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, with the stress usually on the second, fifth, seventh, and tenth syllables, and a marked cæsure in the middle of the line<sup>21</sup>:

$\frac{3}{4}$  

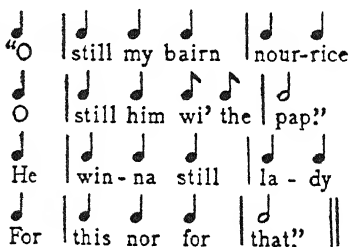
O where have you been, Lord Ran-dal, my son

O where have you been, my hand-some young man?

I have been to the wild wood, moth-er make my bed soon

For I'm wea-ry wi' hunt-ing and fain wad lie down.

"Lamkin" is in Common Measure, but has such a large number of short lines and irregular stresses that some of the stanzas of every version sound like doggerel when read aloud. There is, however, a special pattern in all the tunes to which it is sung, in eighteenth-century Scottish and twentieth-century Newfoundland versions alike. This pattern, too, is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, and therefore roughly dactylic, and unlike "Lord Randal", the phrases are short, with two bars to each line:

$\frac{3}{4}$  

O still my bairn nour-ric

O still him wi' the pap?

He win-na still la-dy

For this nor for that?"

In the course of a tune's transmission, the metrical pattern is the part which undergoes the least change. A set of versions of a song, which have stemmed from a common original, may differ one from another in key, in mode and in arrangement of phrases but as a rule they will still have the same metrical pattern. This seems to be the case with the "Lord Thomas" series of tunes, at least of the several dozen that I have examined. Miss Gilchrist confirms this in her study of "Lamkin"<sup>22</sup>: "As constant as Lamkin's name is its triple-time metre—a metre which can be traced back to the sixteenth century and maybe earlier. It is the metre of 'The Death of Queen Jane' (170), of 'Six Dukes Went A-fishing', of the old song, 'The Cuckoo', of 'The Lost Lady Found', 'The Virgin Unspotted', and in Scotland of 'Lord Randal', 'Colin's Cattle' and of a version of 'Gil Morrice' ('Child Maurice', 83) to which Herd says 'Lammikin' is sung. It is also known in Wales; and Lamkin's tunes show connections with most of these tunes; though it is impossible to say how and when borrowings took place." Miss Gilchrist implies that there is one original tune behind all the versions of both "Lamkin" and "Lord Randal", of which the metrical pattern has survived through centuries of oral transmission. Presumably the "Lord Randal" tune diverged from the "Lamkin" tune at some period, when it established its own special pattern of long lines in triple metre, and this pattern has been preserved throughout the many variations which the "Lord Randal" tune has itself undergone.

The history of "Lamkin" and "Lord Randal" provides an example of the way in which variations of ballad tunes arise. The best general description of this process is Miss Gilchrist's: "A new ballad coming into currency would not be sung to a new tune. The singer often brings to the new words some tune he already knows and so makes them acquainted. Often the tune brings with it some of the words—perhaps only the refrain—the singer already associates with it, which may have no relation whatever to the new ballad. The contact of tune and words results in the adaptation of the one to the other. Sometimes one, sometimes each, insensibly



yields something of its rhythm, or stretches or contracts its line or melody, and before long the pair settle as it were into place, and the old tune may then be half-way towards a new one."<sup>23</sup> To produce a change in the metrical pattern, a strong stimulus like the adaptation of new words appears to be necessary; variation of mode and melodic line take place much more readily. A given melodic line may quickly become unrecognizable in oral tradition, unless the intermediate steps in its evolution have been recorded. It is therefore often very difficult to trace the history of a tune.

Despite this difficulty, a certain amount has been learnt about growth and change in folk-music. Changes in the tunes and in the words of a ballad are brought about in much the same way, that is, by "Communal recreation", though this process can be seen in a purer form in the tunes. As we shall see, printed versions of a ballad have often interfered with the oral transmission of its words, and there has been a good deal of reshaping by learned poets in the history of the texts, but there has been no such interference with the music of the ballads. The broadsides seldom included the music but usually directed that the words be sung to a named air. Ballad tunes have therefore a more definitely "folk" character than the words have, but from their history we can learn something about that of the words.

Cecil Sharp has laid down a few general principles.<sup>24</sup> He describes the history of folkmusic in terms of Darwinian evolution, using the three concepts of *Continuity*, *Variation*, and *Selection*. Continuity is ensured by the accuracy of folk-singers' memories. Sharp noted down an identical air from two singers, unknown to each other, who had learned it independently from some mummers thirty years before. Variation takes place for a number of reasons: the adaptation of new words to an old tune (as already mentioned); changes from one mode to another; occasional lapses of memory; and, most important of all, the singers' inventiveness. Sharp knew a blind singer who would "habitually vary every phrase of his tune in the course of a song". Sharp quotes a series of this man's phrase variations and praises them for their ingenuity

and beauty. "They display inventiveness of a high order, as well as wonderful feeling for the modes." The first phrase of an Æolian tune of "Lord Bateman" was varied as follows:



From such changes as these entirely new tunes could gradually arise. Variation, from whatever cause, is the product of individuals, whereas Selection is the act of a community. (By "community" no more is meant here than all the folk-singers of a given time and place.) "Those tune variations which appeal to the community will be perpetuated as against those which attract the individual only." The variations which survive are those best adapted to the struggle for existence, on æsthetic grounds. The community as a whole unconsciously exerts its taste by remembering the variations it likes and forgetting those it dislikes. The sum of a thousand such acts of variation and selection is "communal recreation".

## THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE BALLADS

## I. DATES

THE traditional ballads are often called mediæval and are usually assigned to the Middle Ages in anthologies and textbooks. It is, however, hard to date many of them with any accuracy. An early date seems to be shown by the references to customs and beliefs found in many of them; on the other hand, the dates which can be attached to them from other evidence are mostly later than the fourteenth century. There are two main kinds of evidence by which the dating of the ballads can be approached: that of the historical events which they mention, and that of the texts in which they first appear. The former kind of evidence gives the earliest, and the latter gives the latest date of a ballad's composition. Although in some cases where both dates are known there is a considerable gap between them, yet they often come near enough to each other to indicate a few general conclusions.

I shall begin by considering the evidence provided by the historical events described in some of the ballads. A few of these occurred earlier than 1300, but none proves the existence of ballads before that date. "Sir Aldingar" (59) is about a queen who is falsely accused of adultery and unexpectedly delivered by a champion. About 1140, William of Malmesbury, a chronicler, tells much the same story about Canute's daughter Gunnhild, who was married in 1036 to King Henry (later the Emperor Henry III), and he adds that a story about these happenings was still being sung. It has been suggested<sup>1</sup> that this twelfth-century song is the same ballad as "Sir Aldingar", which was first found in the Percy MS., but this identification is most uncertain. The story in the ballad is a well-known piece of folklore, a variant of the *motif* of the Accused Queen, which is used by Chaucer in his Man of Law's tale.<sup>2</sup> It is

told about other historical characters, like the Lombard Queen Gundiperga (about 630), and about St. Cunigund, wife of the Emperor Henry II, and it is found in several romances and Scandinavian ballads. It is one of those floating legends to which story-tellers like to give a local habitation. The story of "Sir Aldingar" could have been picked up from any number of folklore sources, and it could have been written at any time down to the seventeenth century.

Child says that "Sir Patrick Spens" (58) "may or may not be historical". In 1281, Margaret, the daughter of Alexander III of Scotland, was married to the King of Norway and she was escorted to Norway by a number of Scots lords, many of whom were drowned on the return voyage. Her daughter, the Maid of Norway, became heir to the Scots crown in 1285. She died on the voyage to Scotland—in a storm, according to one account. But no name like Patrick Spens is connected historically with either of these events. Furthermore, as T. F. Henderson had suggested,<sup>3</sup> the ballad could describe yet a third voyage equally well—the one undertaken for James VI in 1589 to bring his bride from Denmark, and here a Patrick Vans does figure. But the evidence is too conjectural to allow us to connect any of these events with the story of a ballad which first appears in the eighteenth century.

"Sir Hugh" (155) has been associated with Hugh of Lincoln, who was said to have been murdered by the Jews in 1255. But the story is a common *motif* in folklore, an anti-Semitic legend which appears in many forms in the Middle Ages (Chaucer uses it in the Prioress' Tale), and there is no reason to connect the ballad with a definite event. "Queen Eleanor's Confession" (156) has probably nothing to do with Henry II's notorious queen. The story of this ballad, too, is based on a common folklore *motif*, a merry tale found in Boccaccio and elsewhere. "Gude Wallace" (157) is not based directly on thirteenth-century history but is taken from the "Romance of Wallace" by Blind Harry (c. 1460).

Professor Entwistle has suggested that Robin Hood was an historical figure of the twelfth century and that the ballads about him may be early.<sup>4</sup> But the only evidence for this Robin

Hood's reality and for such an early date is the statement of one Martin Parker, a seventeenth-century writer of broadsides. His "True Tale of Robin Hood" says that Robin was really the Earl of Huntingdon and died in 1198; his epitaph "was to bee reade within these hundreth yeares, though in old broken English, much to the same sence and meaning", and it is quoted as follows:

Robert Earle of Huntington  
Lies under this little stone.  
No archer like him was so good:  
His wildnesse named him Robbin Hood.  
Full thirteene years, and something more,  
These northerne parts he vexed sore.  
Such out-lawes as he and his men  
May England never know agen.

"Some other superstitious words were in it, which I thought fit to leave out" (Child 154). Parker's evidence can hardly be taken seriously. Similar names turn up again fairly often in mediæval documents. Child mentions that a Thomas Robinhood is one of six witnesses to a grant of 1380 or 1381. Sir Edmund Chambers summarizes five references<sup>5</sup>: names like Robin Hood appear in Sussex in 1296, in Wakefield from 1316 to 1335, at court in 1324, in Sussex again in 1332; and he thinks it very likely that "the story of the outlaw took its start from a Robin Hood who in 1354 was in prison awaiting his trial for trespass of vert and venison in the forest of Rockingham in Northants". Professor Bruce Dickins has pointed out to me two further references: in the *Great Roll of the Pipe* for 1230 a Robertus Hood fugitivus is mentioned, and the Monk Bretton Cartulary for 1332 refers to the "Stone of Robin Hood".<sup>6</sup> There are no means by which any of these can be identified with the hero of the ballads. It even looks as if Robin Hood was a fairly common name, perhaps one used generically for outlaws in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The ballads themselves provide no proof that Robin Hood was a historical figure: there are no incidents

in them that can be identified with actual events. Two fifteenth-century historians, Bower and Major, speak of him, but all their information is evidently derived from the ballads. Whatever the reality of Robin Hood, his adventures in the ballads are, as Child says, "absolutely a creation of the ballad muse".

I have now mentioned the only dates earlier than 1300 that could possibly be assigned to the composition of ballads, and it is clear that they are all very uncertain. There are four ballads about fourteenth-century history and their composition cannot be dated with any more certainty. Here the events are real enough, but the ballads were probably written a long time afterwards. "The Battle of Otterburn" (161) and "The Hunting of the Cheviot" (162), both about a skirmish that took place in 1388, are clearly from the repertoire of Tudor minstrelsy. "Otterburn" even mentions a written source:

'But nyne thousand, ther was no moo  
The cronykle will not layne.\*

"Hugh Spencer's Feats in France" (158) and "Durham Field" (159), both from the seventeenth-century Percy MS., also look like minstrels' accounts of past history.

There are four ballads which mention events of the fifteenth century. "The Battle of Harlaw" (163) is about an event of 1411. The earliest evidence of this ballad's existence is a Scottish prose document, "The Complaynt of Scotland", of 1549, which mentions it as one of the songs popular among the countrymen, and the earliest texts are of the nineteenth century. There is a possibility that the ballad as we now have it may be based on one written soon after the battle. Sir E. K. Chambers thinks that this is unlikely because it falsifies history in favour of the Lowlanders; but such partisan inaccuracy is surely what is found in eyewitness accounts. "Sir John Butler" (165), whose hero died in 1463, also looks as though it might have been composed near the date of the

event it describes, although there is no evidence that Sir John was murdered as the ballad says. "King Henry Fifth's Conquest of France" (164) is literary rather than historical. The story it tells of the King of France making an insulting gift of tennis balls, is apparently taken not from history, but from the Romance of Alexander.<sup>7</sup> "The Rose of England" (166) is an allegory of the War of the Roses, and like "Otterburn", it mentioned a written source ("I am sure the chronicles of this will not lye"), and so proves that it was written long after the event.

There are a good many ballads about sixteenth-century history, and these certainly look more like eye-witness accounts of the events they describe. There are about thirty, including the Border ballads, which are based on sixteenth-century and about twenty based on seventeenth-century history. They include such well-known ballads as "Sir Andrew Barton", 1511; "Johnie Armstrong", 1530; "Earl Bothwell", 1568; "The Bonny Earl of Murray", 1592, "The Lads of Wamphray", 1593; "Lord Maxwell's Last Goodnight", 1613; and "The Gipsy Laddy" (Johnnie Faa was executed in 1624). Some of them, like "Edom o' Gordon", appear in manuscript or print quite soon after the event, and there is no reason to doubt that the others were composed at about the same time. The period between 1550 and 1650 seems to have been the one most productive of historical or semi-historical ballads.

The kind of evidence provided by "historical" events, then, gives no positive indication that any ballads were composed before the fifteenth century, and very little indication that they were being composed before the sixteenth century.

The second kind of evidence, which comes from the first appearance of ballad texts, also points to a comparatively late date. The outstanding exception is the famous "Judas" (23) which occurs in a thirteenth-century manuscript. As Mr. Kenneth Sisam says, it is "the only example before 1400 of the swift and dramatic movement, the sudden transitions, and the restrained expression characteristic of the ballad style".<sup>8</sup> "Judas" may have been composed by an ecclesiastic, together with another semi-popular poem in the same MS. It is true

that it has never appeared in oral tradition, nor is its structure—couplets of six-stressed lines—found in any other ballad. But since the test of a ballad is not that it has been found in oral circulation, nor that it has originated in a particular way, nor that it conforms to a standard metrical structure, but simply that it has certain dramatic and stylistic characteristics, “Judas” ought to be accepted as a genuine ballad.

After “Judas”, the characteristic ballad does not appear again until two hundred years later; and even in fifteenth-century texts it is not very common. Sloane MS. 2593, which dates perhaps from the first half of the fifteenth century, has two ballads, “St. Stephen and Herod” (22), and “Robyn and Gandeleyne” (115). The first of these is again a religious poem based on the Apocryphal story of the roasted cock that crew. It has a piece of extremely “un-popular” Latin in it: “The capon crew Christus Natus est”. “Robyn and Gandeleyne” is more like a typical ballad, with a lyrical refrain “Robyn lyeth in grene wode boundyn”, though it has a minstrel’s conventional beginning:

I herde a carpyng of a clerk,  
Al at yone wodes ende,  
Of gode Robyn and Gandeleyne;  
Was ther non other thyng.

“Riddles Wisely Expounded” (1) is found in a manuscript of about 1450—the oldest text of any of the ballads surviving in oral tradition. It has a genuine and primitive *motif*: a maiden outwits a supernatural being by the power of the word.

The only other ballads to be found in fifteenth-century manuscripts are two about Robin Hood: “Robin Hood and the Monk” (119), about 1450, and “Robin Hood and the Potter” (121), about 1500. There is some evidence that Robin Hood ballads existed as early as the fourteenth century. In the “B” text of “Piers Plowman”, which is dated at about 1377, Sloth knew “rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf erle of Chestre”. Professor Bruce Dickins has noted a fragment in a hand of about 1400 scribbled in a Lincoln Cathedral MS. This looks like the beginning of a ballad:



Robyn hod in scherewod stod  
 hodud and hathud hosut and schod  
 ffour and thuyrti arowus he bar  
 in his hondus.

In the sixteenth century, "A Gest of Robyn Hode" (1117), which consists of at least four ballads strung together to make a narrative of 456 stanzas, was printed several times, one copy perhaps as early as 1500. The "Gest" shows signs of having been composed at an earlier date than this, since a number of Middle-English linguistic forms, possibly older than 1400, have survived the printers' renovations. Judged by the large number of references made to the Robin Hood ballads in fifteenth-century literature, they were probably in wide circulation during that period.

Other traditional ballads besides the "Gest" were printed in the sixteenth century: as, for example, "Adam Bell" (1116). Even after the growth of printing, ballads were still copied out by hand, and there are half a dozen in sixteenth-century manuscripts which may have been for the use of minstrels. These include, "The Battle of Otterburn", "The Hunting of the Cheviot", and "Edom o' Gordon". But the total number of texts belonging to this century is not large, and only fourteen ballads in all have survived in manuscripts or printed texts dating from before 1600.

In the seventeenth century, ballads began to appear in fairly large numbers. There were two main sources: first, the broadsides and the song-books of a broadside type which supply over fifty of the texts in Child, and secondly Percy's Folio MS., which contained forty-six ballads, some only in fragments. Thomas Percy found the Folio in a country house and saved part of it from being used to light fires, and he made it the basis of his *Reliques*.<sup>9</sup> It dates from about 1650, but linguistic evidence points to the copying of sixteenth-century texts by its scribe. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century manuscripts and printed collections provide by far the greater part of Child's corpus; and these show only internal evidence of an earlier date of composition.

The evidence drawn from the first appearance of ballads texts, then, seems to agree to a certain extent with that drawn from the historical events described in the ballads. To sum up, the only evidence for the existence of ballads before 1300 is "Judas"; ballads were known in the fourteenth century and were in fairly wide circulation in the fifteenth century, and the period most productive of ballads was the second half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century.

Indirect evidence of the date of the earliest British ballads may be found in the ballads of other European countries. It is generally considered that the earliest Danish ballads were composed in the thirteenth century (some of them describe identifiable twelfth-century events). In Germany, ballads can apparently be traced back to the early fourteenth century, in Spain to the middle of the fourteenth century, and in France to the fifteenth century. The ballad is therefore not a very ancient genre; it is essentially a development of the late Middle Ages. Even if the earliest possible date, the thirteenth century, be accepted for the whole of Europe, the ballad is still one of the later forms of mediæval literature.

Many scholars of the ballad, however, have tried to prove that the genre is of great antiquity. A great deal has been written about the song attributed to King Canute in the twelfth-century "Historia Eliensis". The chronicler tells how Canute was rowed past the monastery; when he heard the monks singing he stood up in the boat and improvised a song (cantilena). The chronicler gives only the beginning of the song:

'Merie sungen the muneches binnen Ely,  
Tha Cnut Ching reu ther by;  
Roweth, cnites, noer the land  
And here we thes muneches sæng'—

but says that more followed, and he tells us that this song was still being sung in choral-dances.

Gummere<sup>10</sup> claimed that these two couplets were part of

a narrative ballad, but of that there is no evidence. As Sir Edmund Chambers says: "It may just as well have been a lyric in praise of the singing of the monks themselves, or the beauty of the building and its site, or of Canute's own generosity in contributing to its endowment."<sup>11</sup> The recording of the song in the Ely chronicle does not prove that Canute really improvised these words in the eleventh century; all it proves is that a four-beat rhymed couplet with something of a ballad swing was used in English verse in the twelfth century. It shows that by this time, a break had been made with the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and that there had been a shift to a new verse-form of non-English origin. The song does not prove that the genre of the ballads is of great antiquity; it is simply part of the evidence showing that the ballads rest on verse forms which had been current since the twelfth century.

These verse forms differ considerably from the Anglo-Saxon verse of tradition. Anglo-Saxon verse is alliterative and nearly always without rhyme; the lines have four main stresses and a variable number of unstressed syllables, and there is no grouping of lines into couplets or longer stanzas. The new verse form may have originated in several ways. It may have been taken over from the Latin hymns which had for centuries been written in rhyme, in lines having a regular number of syllables and a regular alternation of stress, and in regular stanzas. Alternately, it may have been imitated from the French lyrical forms which had been invented by the troubadours in Southern France in the eleventh century and taken over by the trouvères in Northern France in the twelfth century. Whatever its origin, this new fashion in verse appeared in this country in the twelfth century, and Canute's song is one of its earliest examples. There are others: the hymns of St. Godric, in rough-rhymed couplets, are believed to have been composed before 1170, and other non-alliterative and rhyming verse, like the *Poema morale*, was written down in the twelfth century. By the end of the thirteenth century, this technical innovation had become well established and a good deal of stanzaic lyric had appeared, like the beautiful songs

"Alysoun", and "Lenten is come with love to toun", in the Harleian MS. 2253.

## II. THE BALLADS AND MEDIÆVAL VERSE

The ballads, then, rest on a verse form which was a break from Anglo-Saxon tradition; and the ballad stories also differ from those of Anglo-Saxon tradition. The Germanic epos died out in this country in the eleventh century, and the only British ballads to take their stories from Germanic literature are "Earl Brand" (7) and "Erlinton" (8) which descend from the "Hildesaga", but not directly. Their immediate source was almost certainly a Danish ballad, "Ribold and Guldborg". Even the stories of the Danish ballads have few points of contact with heroic tradition.<sup>12</sup>

However, the ballads do show a relationship with the Romances of the Middle Ages. Their metrical form is of the same kind as that of the Romances, in that it belongs to the new fashion for syllabic and stanzaic verse. Some of the ballads have the same *motifs* as the Romances and a few are derived directly from them. The general name of "Romance" includes several kinds of literature, and of these, the ballads are most closely related to the Lais. The Lais are short narrative poems based as a rule, on a single incident. They are of Breton origin and are full of Celtic folklore. They were adapted into courtly French poetry by Marie de France and others at the end of the twelfth century, and a few were translated and adapted into English and survive in manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Some British ballads share *motifs* with the Lais. T'am Lin, like Lanval and Guigemar, is carried off to the Otherworld by a fairy queen. When the heroine of Marie's "Lai de Yonec" complains of her husband and asks for a lover, she at once puts herself into the power of a fairy knight, who enters her chamber in the form of a hawk as soon as she speaks her wish. In the same way, an elfin knight appears at the beginning of the ballad "Lady Isabel" (4), and in "The Earl of Mar's Daughter" (270), the

lover visits his mistress in the form of a bird. Both in the Lai of "Guigemar" and in "Young Allan" (245), there is a mysterious ship which obeys a man's voice. The eldritch knights and the midnight watch of "Sir Cawline" (61) appeared in the "Lai of the Thorne". "Fair Annie" (62) has the same story as Marie's "Lai of the Ash", where the rejected mistress turns out to be the sister of the bride. In none of these cases is it possible to decide whether the ballad derived directly from the Lai, or whether both have a common source in folklore. But there is one ballad which is quite certainly a re-working of a Lai: "King Orfeo" (19) is related to the beautiful Middle English "Sir Orfeo". Other points of contact between the ballads and the Lais have been noted.<sup>13</sup>

British balladry also has a connection with the more courtly Romances of the Middle Ages. The stories which make up the Arthurian cycle were worked into a courtly form by Chrétien de Troyes in the twelfth century, were expanded into a series of French prose Romances in the thirteenth century, and were translated and adapted into English in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A number of *motifs* have been taken into the ballads from these Romances. For example, the *motif* of the sympathetic plants that spring from the lovers' graves comes from the Tristan series, which began in the twelfth century. Arthurian stories appear in "The Boy and the Mantel" (29), where there is a magic cloak as a test for chastity; in "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (31), where the Loathly Lady is transformed by a kiss, and again, in "King Arthur and King Cornwall" (30). The non-Arthurian courtly Romances have also provided material for some of the ballads. "Sir Lionel" (18) has much in common with the Romances "Sir Eglamour of Artois" and "Eger and Grime". "Hind Horn" (17) has taken from the "Horn" cycle the *motifs* of the hero disguised as a beggar and of the ring dropped into the cup as a sign of recognition. The closest relationship is shown by "Thomas Rymer" (37), which is derived directly from a fifteenth-century poem about Thomas of Erceldoune.

This relationship between the ballads and Romances may be an indirect help in dating some of the ballads. The ballads which resemble Romances proper—as distinct from *Lais*—are certainly from them and are therefore later in date. The Romances concerned exist in manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth century (except for “King Horn” which is in one of the thirteenth century). The corresponding ballads were probably derived from them during the fifteenth or sixteenth century. There may have been an intermediate stage, in the re-shaping of courtly romances into a popular form, which the ballad makers (in this case, probably minstrels) would then popularize still further. The Percy Folio MS. has several romances of this kind, already half-way to becoming ballads: for example, “The Grene Knight”, a doggerel version of that most intricately wrought, learned and moving of all English romances “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”. The elaborate symmetry and symbolism have disappeared, and the wonderful description of scenery, to correspond with the hero’s mind, is replaced by sad stuff like:

When he rode over the mold,  
His geere glistered as gold,  
By the way as he rode;  
Many furleys\* he there did see,  
Fowles by the water did flee,  
By brimest† and bankes so broad.

“The Wedding of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnall”,<sup>14</sup> probably of the fifteenth century, is an older form of “The Marriage of Sir Gawain”; the former was too much of a romance to be included by Child, but the latter passed his tests.

Comparatively few of the ballads show this kind of relationship with the Romances; and it would be wrong to conclude, as some critics have done, that the ballads as a whole are simply fragments of Romances. The ballads also differ greatly from the Romances in their way of telling a story; for the leisurely flow of the Romances they have substituted a dramatic

\* Wonders.

† Waters.

and episodic movement. The material which has been taken over has been transformed into a new kind of poetry.

Another question which has often been discussed with reference to the early history of the ballads, is their relationship to the dance. The critics who have put forward the theory of communal origins have insisted that the ballads were first improvised by the "folk" during a kind of communal dance, and they have claimed that structural features of the ballads like the refrain are evidence of this communal process. Now this communal dance, as we shall see, is entirely hypothetical; and there is no reason to believe that any of our existing ballads were composed in such a way. Nevertheless, the relationship of the ballads to certain dance forms which are known to have existed in the Middle Ages is still a matter for discussion.

The actual word "ballad" has, of course, been claimed as evidence of such a relationship, but quite wrongly. The word is probably from the Latin *ballare*, to dance, but its history shows that its connection with the poems now called ballads is quite arbitrary. During the thirteenth century, a lyric with a fairly intricate stanza and a refrain which probably had its origins in the dance, became known as the *ballada* in Provençal and the *ballata* in Italian. In the fourteenth century, it was taken up and developed by the courtly poets of France who produced what they called the *ballade*. This became fixed as a standard verse-form. It was not narrative but lyrical, and above all, it was sophisticated. The term was taken into the English language and gradually lost its precise meaning, until in Elizabethan times it became applied to various kinds of popular and semi-popular songs, lyric and narrative alike. It was not however, the only term used: Autolycus, in *The Winter's Tale*, is a seller of "ballads", but Sir Philip Sidney in the *Apology* speaks of "Chevy Chase" simply as a "song". It was only in the eighteenth century that the word "ballad" became applied exclusively to popular narrative poetry. It was given its modern usage first by Bishop Percy on the advice of the poet Shenstone, and during the Romantic Revival it caught on generally. The derivation of the word, then, tells us almost nothing about ballad origins.

There was, however, one kind of mediæval lyric certainly associated with the dance. The usual name for this is the Carole, a word which in the Middle Ages is applied both to the song itself and to the dance to which it was sung. The carole, like the non-narrative lyric, seems to have preceded the ballad everywhere in Western Europe. It was a ring-dance, with a leader and a chorus. In the Middle Ages, dancing was universal, and possible had a ritual origin. As an *observatio paganorum* it was continuously attacked by ecclesiastics from the seventh to the fifteenth century. Thanks in part to the anathemas, we can reconstruct the manner of dancing. The dancers, with linked hands, took three steps in measure to the left while the leader sang a line or a stanza, and this was followed by a marking time in place while the whole company sang the refrain. A fourteenth-century preacher writes: "Just as the cow which leads the others into the fields carries a bell on its neck, so the woman who sings first and leads the chorus carries as it were the devil's bell bound to her neck", and another: "The chorus is a circle whose centre is the devil, and all turn to the left."<sup>15</sup>

In the twelfth century, there was a particular craze for the ring-dance, originating in France and spreading rapidly all over Europe. The most famous legend to illustrate this craze is that of the Dancers of Kölbigk, of which there is a version in Robert Mannyng's "Handling Synne" of the fourteenth century.<sup>16</sup> A group of Christmas revellers came to dance in a churchyard led by Bovo. They sent two girls, Merswinda and Wibecina, to bring out the priest's daughter Ava to join them. They linked hands and began the corolla (carole). The priest cursed them, and their hands remained linked together for a year while they danced non-stop. There is a fragment of the fatal song which the dancers are supposed to have sung, and its translation into Latin has something of the rhythm of surviving French carole refrains:

*Equitabat Bovo per silvam frondosam:*  
*Ducebat secum Merswyndam formosam;*  
*Quid stamus, cur non imus?*



"Bovo rode through the leafy forest, he took with him the fair Merswynda"—a rough-rhymed couplet, followed by a line which would precede the chorus's movement. "Why do we stand, why don't we move?" Robert Mannyng draws the moral from this disgraceful affair:

Karolles, wrastlynges or somour games,  
Whoso ever haunteth any syche shames  
Yn cherche, oder yn chercheyerd,  
Of sacrylage he may be a ferd.

It was in the twelfth or thirteenth century that the carole spread to Denmark, that is, some time before the ballads are believed to have originated there. The ballads were certainly danced in Denmark—for example, the dancing of ballads is pictured on an early wall-painting. But this is no proof of the theory that the ballad is the most primitive form of dance-song; and in fact the Danish ballads were adapted to this non-narrative dance-song, the carole, which preceded them chronologically.

References to the dancing of Danish ballads are often found in the ballads themselves.

There dance the Knights in scarlet braid—  
*Tread it so featly, noblemen!*  
And there goes Chrissie, so fair a maid—  
*—for men honour young ladies in the dance.*

The dance goes down through Ribe's street,  
the knights they dance both glad and fleet.

The dance goes down the Ribe's stream,  
the knights they dance in shoes that gleam.

Sir Riber-Wulf he danced the first  
King's man was he in truth and trust.<sup>17</sup>

Danish ballads nearly always have refrains like the lines—"Tread it so featly, noblemen" and "For men honour young ladies in the dance". These were apparently sung by the

chorus while the leader told the story. It is interesting to see that the refrains in the Danish ballads are usually irrelevant to the story; they are almost certainly fragments of the earlier non-narrative caroles:

'Gay goes the dance by the greenwood tree.'

'But now drives the storm o'er the white sands to northward.'

'The summer and the meadow suit so well together.'

In other words, these ballads were set to the tunes of the non-narrative dance song, and the refrains were taken over with the tunes. Danish ballads have another characteristic which shows how the change was made from lyrical carole to narrative dance-song: they often have a short lyrical introduction which, again, has no direct connection with the story. Axel Olrik<sup>18</sup> explains this as follows: "The leader who set the dance going would begin with the customary expression of emotion, but would continue with a narrative ballad in an accordant mood; and, as the tune recurred with every verse, so also one or two of the lines were repeated which indicated the appropriate feeling." The refrain is "invariably found with the ballad" though the introduction "has sometimes fallen away, or expresses something quite alien to the ballad itself". Steenstrup<sup>19</sup> points out that, contrary to the usual impersonality of European ballads, there is sometimes an "I" in this initial "lyrical outburst"; when the narrative begins, the ballad reverts to the normal third person. The ballad used to be sung in this way: "The singer steps forth, holding some silver vessel in his hand; he strikes up the tune and bids the others to participate. . . . The mood and the tune which he has set afloat . . . is maintained throughout by means of the constantly repeated refrain." Here are the first two stanzas of a Danish ballad<sup>20</sup> with lyrical introduction and end-refrain, the narrative beginning only in the second stanza:

1. Three maidens sat in a bower.  
Two broidered with gold,  
The third she wept her own true love  
All under darksome mould.

*Refrain:* (For she loved the knight so truly.)

2. It was the knight Sir Aage  
 Went riding here and there  
 He loved the lady Elselill  
 A maid so fair . . .

Thus, these lyrical survivals indicate that the Danish ballads were preceded and adapted to the non-narrative carole.

If the English and Scottish ballads were ever danced, it must have been to the carole that they were adapted, and it is reasonable to assume that at least some of them were so adapted. Two types of verse-structure used in the British ballads may have arisen through the influence of the carole with its alternation between leader and chorus. The first of these has an external "burden" or refrain, and it is found in the fifteenth-century "carols" which take their name as well as their structure from the carole. At its simplest, this form has the structure *aaaX*; that is, a verse of three rhymed lines sung by the leader, and then one unrhymed line sung as "burden" by the chorus. Later, the burden became a rhymed couplet, and this became rhyme-linked to a fourth line of the verse. The stanza then had the structure *aaab BB*, which is found in the Provençal *ballada* and in our carols:

Lett no man come into this hall.  
 Crome, page, nor yet marshall,  
 But that some sport he bring with all:  
 For now is the time of Christemas.

*Burden:* { Make we merry bothe more and lasse\*  
 { For now is the time of Christemas.

A few ballads have this external refrain or burden; for example, "Robyn and Gandeleyne" (115), and "The Elfin Knight" (2). The second type of structure, with an internal, or alternating refrain, is more commonly found among our ballads. In "The Cruel Mother", for example, the formula is *aBaB*:

*Refrain:* She leaned her back against a thorn  
 Fine flowers in the valley  
 And there she has her sweet babe born  
*Refrain:* And the green leaves they grow rarely.

Professor R. L. Greene, who has written the standard study of the carole and its origins, says that these two types of refrain imply two different modes of performance, the second of the two being associated with "a more broken style of dancing" <sup>21</sup>

Only about a third of the ballads in Child have refrains, and then not in all their versions. Of course, some of the Child ballads which have the couplet form may have lost an alternating refrain when they were written down. Recent collections from American and English folksingers show that at least half of the ballads which are still being sung have refrains. But a great many ballads show no trace of a refrain, whereas all the early Danish ballads have refrains. A possible reason for this is that the dancing of ballads in this country does not appear to have been anything like as common as in Denmark. I know of only one reference to the dancing of ballads here. It is the "Complaynt of Scotlande", 1549, which mentions Tam Lin, Robin Hood and Johnny Armstrong in a list of dances performed by shepherds, and even this may not be a reference to the ballads we know by those names. Nor is it certain that in this country all the ballads were ever performed chorally. One of the few references to a performance of this kind is in Deloney's *Jack of Newbury* (about 1596), where "The Fair Flowere of Northumberland" (9) is quoted with the comment "the maidens in dulced manner chanted out this song, two of them singing the ditty, and all the rest bearing the burden". Deloney's version of the ballad has an alternating refrain:

It was a knight in Scotland borne  
Refrain: *Follow, my love, come over the strand*  
Was taken prisoner and left forlorne  
Refrain: *Even by the good Earle of Northumberland.*

The ballads of European countries other than Denmark, the Faroes, and Britain show no definite connection with the dance; according to Professor Entwistle most of the German and Southern European ballads lack the refrain. Entwistle states that the Spanish and Yugoslav ballads, which have

much in common with our ballads in narrative technique, have probably never been danced. He concludes that "the dance is seen to be a secondary element in ballad poetry but one which has exerted a profound influence".<sup>22</sup> In his opinion, the Scottish ballads with couplet and alternating refrain were the earliest to be composed, and they may have been danced at one time; the other Scottish and English ballads were probably just sung. Even this modest conclusion may be going too far.

### III. BALLAD MIGRATION

Something more can be learned about the early history of the ballads by studying their movement from country to country. If a similar ballad appears in several countries it is as a result of diffusion rather than of independent origin. In folksong, and indeed in the greater part of all kinds of mediæval literature, conservatism is the rule, and inventions are comparatively rare. For instance, the *motif* of a dead man coming on horseback for his love and carrying her to his grave is found in an English broadside ballad, "The Suffolk Miracle" (272), and also, it is said, in folktales of Cornwall, Germany, Scandinavia, and the Slav countries, and in ballads of Greece and the Balkans. Now, there is no question of this *motif* having arisen in each of these countries independently: it must have started at one point and then travelled to each of the countries in turn. About eighty-five of our ballads have *motifs* shared with the ballads of other countries and these may be said to belong to international folksong. These "international" ballads are very difficult to date since they are neither historical nor semi-historical, and most are found only in fairly modern versions. They are believed to be among the oldest of the ballads because of the beliefs and customs they refer to. It is impossible to say in which country they first originated or at what time. Nevertheless, part of their history can be rather tentatively reconstructed by comparative study of their versions.

Europe is divided into four main ballad areas: Romance,

Nordic, Balkan, and Russian. The Romance area includes France, Italy, and Spain, and the Nordic area Britain, Scandinavia, Germany, and parts of Eastern and Central Europe. The British ballads have some points of contact with the German, but they are most closely related to the Scandinavian; and, of the ballads outside the Nordic area, they have most in common with the French.

Our cultural relationship with France is well known: throughout the Middle Ages there was a continual traffic of literary ideas and techniques from France to England. As we have seen, the carole came from France in the twelfth century, and so did the more sophisticated lyric of the *trouvères* and the Romances. Chaucer's art, too, is based to a great extent on the French tradition. There was a similar movement from France to Scandinavia. The carole was followed by a great many translations of Romances made from Old French into Old Norse from the thirteenth century onwards. As well as learned literature, a good deal of folksong seems to have travelled from France to Britain and Scandinavia. (Possibly a certain amount travelled from these two countries back to France.) There was also direct contact between British and Scandinavian balladry, though not between their written poetry. It is not always certain which of the two was the starting point of a given ballad, though in most cases, Scandinavia is the more likely. Mr. Alexander Keith has described the circumstances of the mutual borrowing between Britain and Scandinavia. "From very early times there was much political intercourse between Scotland and Denmark. From the sixteenth century onwards a second line of communication, in trade, was established; England also opened diplomatic and commercial relations with the North. . . . From the middle of the seventeenth century the business intercourse between the north-east of Scotland and Norway became so intimate that in Bergen a regular colony of Aberdeenshire people was founded. . . . Of all British ballads, those of Aberdeenshire are most reminiscent of Scandinavian versions."<sup>23</sup> Ballad themes, like other forms of folklore, and like popular heresies, appear to have moved along the trade routes of Europe.

Rather than generalize about the relationship between the ballads of these three countries, I shall give as examples two particular ballads whose family trees can be partially reconstructed. The first of these is "Edward" (13), of which there are versions in Britain, Scandinavia, and America; it has been studied in great detail by Professor Archer Taylor.<sup>24</sup>

In Child, there are three versions of this ballad, the oldest being the famous one from Percy's *Reliques*, 1765;

'Why dois your brand sae drap wi bluid,

Edward, Edward,

Why dois your brand sae drap wi bluid,

And why sae sad gang yee O?'

'O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,

Mither, mither,

O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,

And I had nae mair bot hee O.'

(13 B, 1)

A part of "Edward" is also incorporated into four versions of "The Twa Brothers" (49), and into two of "Lizie Wan" (51), none of which are older than the mid-eighteenth century. There are sixteen American versions which were collected in the twentieth century. The parallel Scandinavian ballad is called "Sven i Rosengård". There are three Danish versions and a great many Swedish, Swedish-Finnish, and Finnish, all nineteenth and twentieth century. Taylor has reconstructed the archetypal ballad by collating the details which are common to all versions and by noting the comparative age of the social customs referred to in each version. If a detail, despite "a superficial relevancy, is imperfectly fitted into the ballad", we can conclude that it is a late intrusion, and we can assume the details which do fit to be original. I shall not quote Taylor's detailed and convincing arguments, but merely summarize his conclusions.

The original ballad began with the dialogue between mother and son.

(1) The son says that his sword is bloody because he has killed his hawk, and then, in succession, that he has killed his horse (or hound), and his brother. This incremental

repetition, in a sequence of three, belongs to the original ballad. (In Scandinavian versions, he admits almost at once to killing his brother, and the story loses force.)

(2) The relative he has killed is his brother according to most versions. (In Percy's version it is his father, and in some Scandinavian versions, his sister.)

(3) He is to be punished by death, not by exile. A Scots version has kept the original *motif*:

‘I’ll set my foot in a bottomless ship  
And ye’ll never see mair o me.’ (13 A)

That refers to the Northern capital punishment of fratricide by exposure in an open boat.

(4) The hero makes the “nuncupative testament”; that is, he names his heirs in his will and disposes of his property. (The curse he leaves to his mother is a late intrusion which has crept in from another ballad, probably “Lord Randal” (12).)

(5) The mother asks when her son will return, and he answers with a series of paraphrases for “never”. One version of “Lizie Wan” has something of this:

‘And when will thou come hame again.  
O my son Geordy Wan?’  
‘The sun and the moon shall dance on the green  
The night when I come hame.’ (51 A, 12)

But it is clearer in a Danish version, in which the son says that he will return when feathers sink, when stones float, when the sea burns, etc., and that will be at the world's end. The paraphrases “properly end in an allusion to the day of judgment. In short, the murderer acknowledges his crime and realizes that his punishment endures while the world lasts”.

Taylor's conclusion is that the ballad originated in Scotland or in England during the Middle Ages. In the older English versions (Percy, Herd, Motherwell), the killer has a sword, horse and hawk; he has property, including a “towered hall”, to dispose of. This “courtly background . . . implies customs



and manners quite foreign to the world in which the modern traditional forms move". In these modern versions, both Scandinavian and American, the killer is a farmer who waters his horses, quarrels meanly with his brother, leaves farm animals in his will and takes refuge in cowardly flight. There has, therefore, been a degeneration which has happened independently in Scandinavia and Great Britain. "Since no trace of the ballad's earlier courtly form has been found in Scandinavia, and since the ballad seems relatively well-established in English tradition we must conclude that it passed from Scotland or England to Scandinavia."

"Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (73), the other example I shall discuss, has not had such careful treatment from any scholar. This ballad has parallel versions both in France ("Les Tristes Noces") and in Scandinavia ("Herr Peder and Little Kirsten").<sup>25</sup> The story is about a young man who gives up his true love to marry another girl. The forsaken lover turns up at his wedding richly dressed, and both she and the young man die of love. In discussing the ballad's possible place of origin, scholars of three countries have shown some unconscious nationalist bias. Grundtvig thought that it originated in Scandinavia and that the Anglo-Scottish versions were offshoots; he doesn't discuss the French. Doncieux considered that the French was the original, that the Anglo-Scottish derived from the French, and the Scandinavian from the Anglo-Scottish. Gerould, on the other hand, says: "It seems probable that the ballad migrated from Great Britain to the North, there to undergo one set of variations, and again to France where it suffered another transformation. In other words the evidence points to diffusion from a British source."<sup>26</sup> I cannot agree with Gerould's conclusions, and even his description of the ballad seems to me to be inaccurate. In Great Britain, there is no one ballad of "Lord Thomas", but two main "families" of versions: the first is represented by Child, E, F, H, I, and by three versions collected by Greig in Aberdeenshire; and the second family is represented by Child D, G, and B, by one of Greig's, and by all the modern versions which have been collected in England and America.

In Scandinavia, there are also two distinct families, and in France, there is one family. To make the relationship of all the versions clearer, I shall quote the French version, and then set out in tabular form the main incidents of all the other versions.

### LES TRISTES NOCES

Qui veut ouïr chanson, chansonette nouvelle?

*Chante, rossignolet!*

Qui veut ouïr chanson, chansonette nouvelle.

C'est d'un jeune garçon et d'une demoiselle.

Ont fait l'amour sept ans, sept ans sans en rien dire.

Mais au bout des sept ans, le galant se marie.

Au jardin de son père y a un buisson d'orties.

En a fait un bouquet pour porter à s'amie:

'Tenez, m'ami', tenez, voici la départie!

A une autre que vous mon père me marie.'

'Celle que vous prenez est elle bien jolie?'

'Pas si joli' que vous, mais el est bien plus riche.'

'Vous quittez la beauté pour prendre la richesse!'

'La belle, en vous priant, viendrez vous à mes nueces?'

La belle, s'ous venez, venez-y donc bien propre.'

La belle n'y a manqué, s'est fait faire trois robes:

L'une de satin blanc, l'autre de satin rose,

Et l'autre de drap d'or, pour marquer qu'el est noble,

Du plus loin qu'on la voit: 'Voici la mariée!'

'La marié' ne sui, je suis la delaissée.'

L'amant, qui la salu' la prent par sa main blanche,

La prent pour faire un tour, un petit tour de danse.

Au premier tour qu'el fait la belle tombe morte.

'O belle, levez-vous! Voulez mourir par force?'

Si mourez pour m'amour moi, je meurs pour la vôtre!'

Il a pris son couteau, se le plante en les côtes.

Les gens s'en vont disant: 'Grand Dieu, quels tristes nueces!'

O les povres enfans, tous deus morts d'amourette!'

A: the hero (Lord Thomas).

B: the abandoned lover (Fair Eleanor).

C: the bride (the nutbrown girl).

\* nocces.

<i>Incident</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>British I</i>
1. A and B are lovers of long standing, but A is going to marry C.	yes.	yes.
2. A says that his father is compelling him to marry C.	yes.	no: A asks his relatives if he should marry C but finally decides for himself.
3. C is uglier but richer than B.	yes.	yes, in some; but no, in two versions of this family, where B is richer than C.
4. A gives B a farewell bouquet.	yes.	yes, but only in one version.
5. A invites B to the wedding; and	yes.	yes.
5a. tells her to dress well for it.	yes.	yes, but only in one version.
6. B asks her relatives if she should go to the wedding; they advise against it.	no.	no.
7. B dresses magnificently; and	yes.	yes.
7a. has her horse shod.	no.	yes.
8. A welcomes B on her arrival at the wedding.	yes.	not stressed.
9. Words are exchanged between B and C.	no.	yes: C speaks to B "Wi muckle spite".
10. B dies of love.	yes (at the wedding).	yes (after the wedding).
11. A kills C.	no.	no.
12. A kills himself.	yes.	no: A sees B's ghost and dies of love.
13. "Sympathetic plants" grow from the graves of A and B.	yes (in some versions).	yes (in some versions).

*British II**Scandinavian I**Scandinavian II*

yes.	yes.	yes.	1.
no: as in British I, A asks relatives.	not mentioned.	not mentioned.	2.
yes.	no: B is richer than C (compare some versions of British I).	not mentioned.	3.
no.	no.	no.	4.
yes.	no: A tells B <i>not</i> to come	no, and as in	5.
not men- tioned.	to the wedding, but when she insists tells her <i>not</i> to wear her gold.	Scandinavian I.	5a.
yes.	no.	no.	6.
yes.	yes.	yes.	7.
no.	yes.	no.	7a.
yes.	no: A repulses B on her arrival.	no.	8.
yes, but B disparages C.	no: B behaves nobly during the wedding.	no, and as in Scandi- navian I.	9.
no: C kills B.	yes: B hangs herself.	no: B kills A (in one version B stabs A but not C; in another, B burns both A and C).	10.
yes.	yes.	no.	11.
yes.	yes.	no.	12.
in some ver- sions.	no.	no.	13.

It can be seen that the "central" incident of the ballad is that of Eleanor's appearance at the wedding in rich clothes. (Incident 7, which is common to all versions.) In Britain, this incident distinguishes "Lord Thomas" from another ballad, "Fair Margaret and Sweet William" (74), which is very like it and which has become partly confused with some of the versions of the first British family. The French ballad, with its restrained melancholy and grave irony ("*La mariée ne suis, je suis la délaissée*"), is the finest achievement; here the story is told with the greatest economy and coherence. All the incidents which it includes seem to belong to the archetype; they form a simple and logical sequence. The incidents which are not found in this French version, but in the versions of other countries, look like intrusions. Incident 6, for example, is a piece of incremental repetition found only in "British II", where it seems to have been inserted to balance the question and answer of incident 2. Incident 9, the words exchanged between Eleanor and the bride which constitute an additional and rather unnecessary cause of the tragedy, also seems intrusive. Incident 11 is peculiar to the especially blood-thirsty stories of British II and Scandinavian I. There are also a number of minor intrusions in the British versions which come from the British fondness for incremental repetition and for describing conventional finery. (The British versions also have more of a fairy-tale atmosphere than the others.)

As well as these intrusions, the British and the Scandinavian families show many divergencies from the incidents found in the French ballads. British I diverges the least: it does so in incidents 12 and 2, the change in the latter incident helping to build up the tension and, incidentally, making Lord Thomas' marriage more of an act of free-will. The forced marriage of the French version would be nearer to mediæval reality. Apart from these differences, British I corresponds fairly closely to the French.

In British II, incident 10 is altered, and incident 11 is added. The change actually begins with incident 9, where fair Eleanor speaks rudely to the nut-brown bride:

'Is this your bride?' Fair Ellin she sayd,  
'Methinks she looks wondrous browne;  
Thou mightest have had as fair a woman  
As ever trod on the ground.'

That provides a motive for the murder of Eleanor by the nut-brown bride, a *dénouement* which is peculiar to this family. Incident 11 is then added, a ferocious retribution:

Lord Thomas he had a sword by his side  
As he walked about the hall;  
He cut off his bride's head from her shoulders  
And he threw it against the wall.

In Scandinavian II, Eleanor is transformed from an innocent victim into a resolute killer, a type which appears fairly often in Scandinavian ballads. In one version, she is a fury who takes a blood-thirsty revenge:

Sir Peter awakes but he wakes not ere  
The flame is playing in the young bride's hair.

Sir Peter springs from his bed, oer late  
He saw little Kersti go out through the gate.

'Ah, dear little Kersti, now help thou me!  
Another time shall I help thee.'

And it was little Kersti, her laugh he heard:  
'I wot well how you keep your word.'<sup>27</sup>

The Scandinavian versions are more bare and stark and they have fewer conventional intrusions than the English versions. They do not include incident 2, and so give no reason for the lover's abandonment of his mistress. They show a great deal of divergence in their endings, all of which are more or less violent.

The incident (13) of the sympathetic plants which grew from the lovers' tombs requires some comment. It is found

only in the Normandy and Lorient versions of the French ballad, that is from the area nearest to England:

Sur la tombe du garçon	on y mit une épine;
Sur la tombe de la belle	on y mit une olive:
L'olive crût si haut	qu'elle embrassa l'épine.

It appears in some versions in both British families:

Lord Thomas was buried in the church,  
 Fair Eleanor in the choir;  
 And out from her bosom there grew a red rose,  
 And out of Lord Thomas the briar.

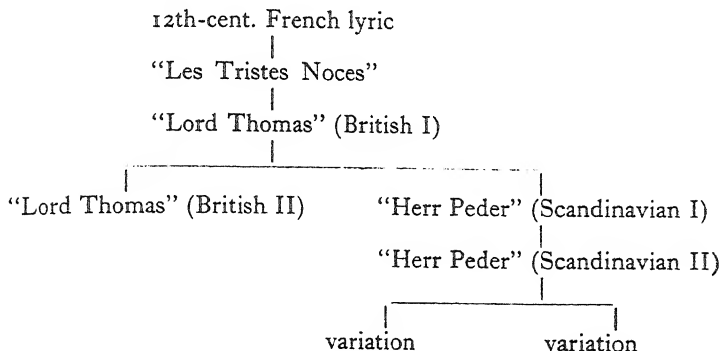
It grew till it reached the church tip top  
 When it could grow no higher;  
 And then it entwined like a true lover's knot  
 For all true loves to admire.<sup>28</sup>

The reason for the erratic appearance of this *motif* is that it is not peculiar to this ballad. It is shared by some versions of several other ballads, a kind of "free variable", borrowed probably from the Tristan romance, which ballad singers attached to any ballad they thought was suitable.

To conclude, the nearest to the archetypal ballad is, in my opinion, the French version. It tells a simple story out of which the British and Scandinavian ballads could have developed—the reverse process would involve too many difficulties. British I is nearest to the French; its story is practically the same story filled out with incremental repetition and other national ballad conventions. British II is a rehandling of the story which has now become violent and tragic rather than pathetic. It has turned into a much more dramatic ballad. The Scandinavian versions are even further away from the French, and the second Scandinavian family, with its variant endings to the story, is even further away than the first.

The French version derives another claim to be considered as the earliest from the general drift of all kinds of literature from France to Scandinavia and Britain, which is known to

have taken place in the Middle Ages. Finally, the *motif* of the forsaken girl appearing at her lover's wedding, appears in a twelfth-century French lyric ("De la vile issoit pensant . . ."),<sup>29</sup> and that may be the ancestor of this whole group of ballads. The following is a tentative family tree:





## CHAPTER V

### THE LATER HISTORY OF THE BALLADS

By comparing the different versions of the ballads, the history of many of them can be traced over a number of years. Some have undergone considerable transformations in the three or four centuries during which they have been known. The same kinds of changes seem to take place in all ballads alike, no matter how different their origins may have been. There are three main causes of change: communal recreation, the printing of versions as broadsides, and re-shaping by skilled poets.

First, communal recreation. It can be seen in its purest form in the history of ballad music, since the tunes of the ballads were rarely printed before the nineteenth century. I have quoted Sharp's description of the mechanism by which the community exerts its taste by varying and selecting tunes. His description applies to some extent to ballads texts as well. Communal recreation is the means by which a ballad, however learned its origin, loses the signs of individual authorship and takes on impersonality and the other ballad characteristics. It may work for bad or for good. Degeneration often occurs when a ballad gets into oral tradition: not all singers have good memories, references to extinct beliefs may become unintelligible and then corrupt (as in "the cocks are crowing a merry midlarf" for "on merry middle-earth"), and the poetic sensibility of a community may decline. There is a good deal of rubbish and nonsense in Child's collection, and even more in the modern American collections. On the other hand, communal recreation may sometimes produce a large number of variations in a ballad, each with its own merit; and in these cases it would be impossible to say that any particular variation is the best because it is nearest to a hypothetical archetype.

For example, Gerould quotes eight sets of the opening

lines of "The Unquiet Grave" (78), all of which happen to be excellent. Each says much the same thing as Child's A text:

The wind doth blow today, my love,  
And a few small drops of rain . . .

and each says it in a slightly different and equally felicitous way.<sup>1</sup> Communal recreation may sometimes improve a ballad, at least in certain respects, and notably in the dramatic handling of the story. The changes it produces are usually greater compression, the disappearance of links in the narrative, and a higher ratio of dialogue to explanation. Gerould has described the different versions of "Sir Lionel" (18), a ballad which was probably derived from a rather diffuse literary romance of the later Middle Ages. In the chronological sequence of English, Scottish, and American versions, the story has gradually become simplified, until in an American version only one dramatic episode remains. Gerould comments: "Sir Lionel has become a better ballad, rather than a worse one, since the middle of the seventeenth century when the scribe of the Percy Manuscript copied it down."<sup>2</sup> "Lamkin" is in my opinion more dramatic in a modern Labrador version<sup>3</sup> than it is in Child's nineteenth-century Scottish version (93 A). This ballad tells the story of the bloody mason who takes his revenge on Lord Wearie by murdering his wife and child. In the Scottish version, there are two stanzas to explain that the nurse was Lamkin's accomplice:

But the nourice was a fause limmer  
as eer hung on a tree;  
She laid a plot wi Lamkin,  
whan her lord was oer the sea.

She laid a plot wi Lamkin,  
when the servants were awa,  
Loot him in at a little shot-window  
and brought him to the ha.

In the Labrador version, however, this passage is left out,

and the nurse's treachery is revealed only by her action:  
Lamkin

Knocked at the front door  
And the nurse let him by.

This text shows the qualities of a typical modern American version so well that it is worth quoting in full:

### THE PROUD LAMKIN

Oh, a better man than the Lamkin  
He never built with stone.  
He built Dundreary's framehouse  
But of payment got none.

'Ho, give to me, Dundreary,  
So give to me my hire,  
Come give to me, Dundreary,  
Or I'll burn your house with fire.'

Said Dundreary to his lady  
They was walking on the quay  
'Look out for bold Lamkin  
When he comes up this way.'

'Why should I beware Lamkin?  
Why need I look out for him  
When my doors are fast bolted  
And my windows pinned in?'

Dundreary hadn't gone an hour  
When proud Lamkin come nigh,  
He knocked at the front door  
And the nurse let him by.

'Where's the men of the house?'  
Spake up the bold Lamkin.  
'They're in the barn threshing,  
And they'll not come in.'

'Where's the women of the house?'  
Spake up the bold Lamkin.  
'They're at the well washing,  
And they'll not come in.'

'O, where is your master,  
Is he not without?'  
'He's gone to Conception.'  
The false nurse cried out.

'O where is your mistress,  
Is she not within?'  
'She's in her room sewing  
With her windows barred in.'

'What'll we do,' says Lamkin,  
'To make her come in?'  
'Pierce the babe in the cradle,'  
Says the false nurse to him.

So the Lamkin he pierced it,  
And the false nurse she sung  
Till the blood out of the cradle  
And from each bar it run.

'O mistress, dear mistress,  
How can you sleep so fast?  
Can't you hear your young Sir Johnson  
Acrying his last?'

'O please my child, Orange,  
O please him with the key.'  
'He won't be pleased, lady  
For all my nurses fee.'

'O please my child, Orange,  
Please him with the wand.'  
'He won't be pleased, my lady,  
For all his father's land.'

'O still my child, Orange,  
O still him with the bell.'  
'He won't be stilled, madam,  
Till you come down yourself.

'For I can't pacify him  
On the nursemilk nor pap,  
So I pray you come down, madam,  
And quiet him on your lap.'

'How can I come downstairs  
On such a cold winter's night,  
With no spark of fire burning,  
Nor no candle alight?'

'You've got two holland sheets up there  
As white as the snow.  
I pray you come down, ma'am  
By the light of them so.'

The first step she took,  
She trod on a stone.  
The next step she took  
It was on the Lamkin.

'O mercy, you Lamkin,  
O mercy have on me.  
Though you have killed my Johnson  
You shall have all your fee.

'O spare my life Lamkin,  
For one, two o'clock,  
And I'll give you all the money  
You can take on your back.'

'If you'd give me the money  
Like the sand of the sea,  
I'd not keep my bright knife  
From your white skin so free.'

'You'll get Orange, my nurse  
And her bright yellow hair  
And a peck of red gold,  
Although she's my flower.'

'O where is that nurse Orange?  
Go send her to me.  
She can hold the silver basin  
While your heart's blood runs free.

'Now, shall I kill her, Orange?  
Or shall I let her be?'  
'Oh kill her, kill her, Lamkin,  
For she's been no good to me.'

'Go scour the silver basin,  
Go scour it nice and clean,  
To hold the lady's heartblood  
For she comes of noble kin.'

'There needs no basin, Lamkin,  
Let the blood run through the floor.  
What better is the heartblood  
Of the rich than of the poor?'

'Did you ever want for meat, Orange?  
Did you ever want for gold?  
Or ever want for anything  
A lady fine could hold?'

'I never wanted meat, ma'am,  
Nor have I wanted gold,  
But often I wanted many things  
A lady fine could hold.'

So with that the bold Lamkin  
He stuck his knife keen,  
And the rich lady's heartblood  
It dropped on the stone.

Dundreary in a month or more  
Come sailing on the foam  
And sad and bitter was his heart  
As he drew in his home.

There was blood in the nursery  
There was blood in the hall,  
And blood on the stairs,  
And her heartblood on all.

'Come here, come here, Lamkin,  
And I'll pay you your fee.'  
And the fee that he paid him  
He hung on the tree.

'Come here, come here, Orange,  
And I'll pay off your hire.'  
And the hire that he paid her  
He burnt her in the fire.

"Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard" (81) has also gained in intensity after 300 years. The earliest version, apart from stanzas quoted by Beaumont and Fletcher, is a seventeenth-century broadside, which is certainly not as moving as some of the modern American versions, like those in Cecil Sharp's *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians*.

Communal re-creation does not, however, account for all the changes that take place in ballads. The influences of printing and of reshaping by skilled poets also appear in the history of many of them. This can be illustrated from two ballads whose earlier history is discussed in the last chapter—"Edward" (13), and "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (73). In most of the versions of "Edward", communal re-creation alone seems to have been at work; thus, in the modern Scandinavian and American versions the courtly background of the archetype has been replaced by a peasant setting; and in the Scottish versions, the paraphrases for "never" have gone and the curse

on the other has been added. Percy's version (13 B), on the other hand, shows that reshaping by a gifted poet which I mentioned as a third cause of change. Percy said only that it had been communicated by Sir David Dalrymple (a literary friend of Boswell's and later a Scots law-lord). It is written in a highly suspicious imitation of archaic Scots spelling—dois, haukis, nevir, deir, steid, and so on—though that is in itself no proof that this version is "literary" in origin. More significantly, the murdered brother is changed to "father", and the punishment by death now appears as punishment by exile:

'And whatten penance wul ye drie for that,

Edward, Edward?

And whatten penance wul ye drie for that?

My deir son, now tell me O.'

'Ile set my feit in yonder boat,

Mither, mither

Ile set my feit in yonder boat,

And Ile fare ovir the sea O.'

(13 B)

The *motif* of legal execution by exposure in an open boat must have been part of the archetype. The "penance" and "exile" of this version shows a "weakening of the original situation" and a "failure to grasp the irony of the son's remark", but the alteration is entirely justified since, as Taylor says, "if we try to insert the notion of execution into Percy's version the elaborate and beautiful metrical structure is necessarily destroyed". This text is "a revision of a folksong, a rewriting which may justly compare with Goethe's 'Heidenröslein' ".<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that this is not only the best of all the versions but one of the best of all the ballads. T. F. Henderson calls it "a quite admirable example of the non-vulgarized Scots of the seventeenth and later centuries"<sup>5</sup> and points out its linguistic superiority to the average traditional versions. The progressive revelations are finely timed, and the hero's rounding on his mother at the end with a curse is



ballad drama at its highest. The rather lame ending of the traditional Scottish version

'What wilt thou leave to thy mother dear,  
     Son Davie, son Davie?'  
 'A fire of coals to burn her, wi hearty cheer,  
     And she'll never get mair o me.' (13 A)

has been transformed into:

'And what wul ye leive to your ain mither deir,  
     Edward, Edward?  
 And what wul ye leive to your ain mither deir?  
     My deir son, now tell me O.'  
 'The curse of hell from me sall ye beir,  
     Mither, mither,  
 The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,  
     Sic counseils ye gave to me O.'

"Lord Thomas" has a more complicated history. The first of its two families, the one which is most like the French family, shows only communal recreation. This family is found mainly in the north-east of Scotland: Child 73 E, F, and H are from that area and three from Aberdeenshire have been noted by Greig. The history of the second family of versions illustrates the stabilizing effect of frequent printing. This family has the double murder and suicide and differs also in minor details from the first; I have suggested that it is the result of a wholesale reshaping of the original French story. It has been the more popular of the two families in England and America, and it has also been found in Scotland. There are a large number of versions. The earliest text is a broadside of the seventeenth century, and this version shows a remarkable continuity down to the present day. It has often been reprinted, as in *A Collection of Old Ballads*, in 1723, by Percy in his *Reliques*, by Ritson in 1783, by Buchan in 1825 and in many broadsides; and it has often been collected from folk-singers. Child gives five "recited copies" which have

only slight variations, and a similar Scottish version. Since Child, many practically identical versions have been collected in England, and in many parts of America (South Carolina, Maine, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Ohio, and Michigan). An English text in the *Folksong Journal* for 1905 and the three texts in Sharp's Appalachian collection (1917) correspond stanza for stanza and almost phrase for phrase with the seventeenth-century broadside.<sup>6</sup> This continuity cannot be explained by the tenacity of folk-memory; the reason for it lies rather in the frequent printing of the seventeenth-century version. The printers and editors have simply copied it from one another, and so large quantities have always been available in the countryside. For example, this standard text was sold in the nineteenth century by the Catnach Press, one of the largest sources of broadsides at that time. The same standardization took place in America. The editors of *British Ballads from Maine* have traced to a nineteenth-century song-book one apparently "traditional" version, which a folksinger had copied out faithfully, even reproducing the printer's errors: they conclude: "Few other ballads are so widely known, (and this) indicates dispersion by song-books rather than by pure oral tradition."<sup>7</sup> Without the regularizing influence of the printed text on each successive generation of folk-singers this version could not have remained so stable. Gerould is a little misleading when he suggests that the frequent reprinting of "Lord Thomas" was unfortunate: "Perhaps because of its very excellence and popularity, it suffered through early printing as a broadside and the consequent diffusion of an inferior version; but it did not perish on that account, as is witnessed by the many variants recovered of late years."<sup>8</sup> I suspect that this and many other ballads might have perished much sooner if they had not been printed.

There is another version of "Lord Thomas" (73 A) which fits into neither family, and which, like Percy's "Edward", is an example of intervention by a gifted poet. Child was rash in calling it "The Scottish traditional copy", though his description of it as "one of the most beautiful of all ballads" is certainly just. This, too, appeared in the *Reliques* in 1765

with the comment that it is "given, with some corrections from an MS. copy transmitted from Scotland". We don't know what Percy's corrections were, but the Olde Englishe of this stanza may be suspected:

Lord Thomas he saw Fair Annet wex pale,  
 And marvelit what mote bee;  
 But when he saw her dear heart's blude  
 A' wood-wroth wexed hee.

Percy's version is peculiar in that it combines the phraseology of the first family with the plot of the second. It opens with a pair of stanzas which are almost identical with the version which was collected for Sir Walter Scott and which belongs to the first family (Child I):

Lord Thomas and Fair Annet  
 Sate a' day on a hill;  
 Whan night was cum, and sun was sett,  
 They had not talkt their fill.

Lord Thomas said a word in jest,  
 Fair Annet took it ill:  
 'A, I will nevir wed a wife  
 Against my ain friends' will.'

It also uses much the same dialect words about the nut-brown bride:

'Her oxen may dye i the house, billie,  
 And her kye into the byre,  
 And I sall hae nothing to mysell  
 Bot a fat fadge by the fyre.'

Again, as in the first family, it enlarges on the descriptions of the girl's finery as she sets out for the wedding, with that hyperbolic richness typical of Scottish balladry. On the other hand, the plot of Percy's version resembles that of the second

family, in that it has the double murder and suicide.<sup>9</sup> Percy's text looks to me as if it had been written by someone who deliberately combined the more dramatic of the two plots with the more "poetic" of the two sets of words. The result is admirable: the story is extremely well told, and the stanzas describing "Fair Annet's" progress to the wedding show a brilliant use of the conventional images of finery:

16. The horse Fair Annet rade upon  
He amblit like the wind;  
Wi siller he was shod before,  
Wi burning gowd behind.
17. Four and twanty siller bells  
Wer a' tyed till his mane,  
And yae tift o the norland wind,  
They tinkled ane by ane.
19. And whan she cam to Marie's kirk,  
She sat on Marie's stean:  
The cleading that Fair Annet had on  
It skinkled in their een.

Unlike the versions in the second family, Percy's text has a hint of the supernatural. Fair Annet appears like the Queen of Faery in "Thomas Rymmer" (37). And, as Wimberly points out, the "ballad faith in another life" is evoked in the stanza where Thomas asks the dying Annet to wait for him in her passing:

28. 'Now stay for me, dear Annet, he sed,  
Now stay, my dear,' he cry'd;  
Then strake the dagger untill his heart,  
And fell deid by her side.

Percy's version, then, has all the dramatic tension of the broadside together with a richer background of folklore and

a more dignified diction. As imaginative art, it stands far above any other text.

The third cause of change in the ballads, reshaping by learned poets, is most evident in the period 1740 to 1780, and it is perhaps no accident that many of the great ballads appeared in their most beautiful form at this time. Between these dates Percy was busy collecting: his *Reliques* includes a high proportion of the really great ballad versions, while other collections, containing excellent texts, were printed at about the same time. It was then that the art of the ballad reached its height in Scotland, and it seems likely that this perfection of form was brought about by a number of talented and anonymous poets. At a time when new ballads were no longer being composed and the practice of ballad singing was probably beginning to decline, they transformed folk-tradition into literature, and gave the ballads their final form as far as literary criticism is concerned. For example, Percy's *Reliques* included, besides "Lord Thomas" and "Edward", the text of "Sir Patrick Spens" (78 Aa), quoted in Chapter II, much more compact, finished, and powerful than any of the other versions, and a fine text of "Sir Hugh or the Jew's Daughter" (155 B). The best text of "Johnie Cock" (114 A) was found among Percy's papers with a note stating that it had been sent from Carlisle in 1780. In 1755 R. and A. Foulis published in Glasgow admirable versions of "Young Waters" (94) and of "Edom o Gordon" (178). In the 1740 edition of his *Evergreen*, Allan Ramsay put the best version of "Barbara Allan" (84), and in the 1750 edition, the best version of "The Bonny Earl of Murray" (181). Ballads with a high degree of skill and polish were printed in Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs* in 1756, including the superior version of "The Wee, Wee Man" (38 A), which T. F. Henderson praises as an example of "the old vernacular Scots of the educated classes",<sup>10</sup> and it is to Herd that we owe the best versions of "Clerk Saunders" (69 A and B).

Robert Chambers in 1849 was the first critic to notice that so many of the ballads printed between 1740-1780 had "an author's finish clearly impressed upon them": "All those

which Percy obtained in MSS. from Scotland are neat finished compositions as much as any ballad by Tickell or Shenstone." Chambers was an expert folklorist with an intimate knowledge of the true art of the peasantry, and his opinion is worth something; though there is no reason to think that he was right in attributing all the Percy versions to one single author. Chambers' approach was followed by T. F. Henderson, who has been almost alone in examining the eighteenth-century versions critically and with a sound knowledge of the different kinds of Scottish vernacular.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century this re-shaping of folk-tradition into literature appeared in a slightly different form, and this time we know two of the men who did it: Burns and Scott. Burns's work is a classic example of the interaction of folksong with learned poetry. Although he came of farming stock and his mother was almost illiterate, Burns, like his father, was an educated man, and he had a good knowledge of English literature; he was in close touch with both eighteenth-century polite letters and Scottish folksong. Much of his best work, including his contributions to Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*, was done in an antiquarian spirit, as an attempt to save folksong from extinction. But it is not easy to distinguish his editorial work from his original, creative work. He had three methods of composing: first, he would "edit" and polish up songs that came to him in a more or less complete state; secondly, he would construct a whole song around a few fragmentary verses; and thirdly, he would write an entirely new song to a tune that was running in his head. Burns has often said which method he was following,<sup>11</sup> but where he has not done so, it is almost impossible for us to find out, since he worked so closely to the Scottish folksong tradition. "Auld Lang Syne", for example, is a puzzle: Burns claimed that he only edited it, but it seems probable that he invented most of it, though it is not certain. Burns was unfortunately not greatly interested in the ballads but preferred other kinds of folksong. But he contributed a few versions to the *Scots Musical Museum*; and I feel sure that he was personally responsible for the magical stanzas in "Tam Lin" (39 A, 36-37).

Gloomy, gloomy was the night,  
And eerie was the way,  
As fair Jenny in her green mantle  
To Miles Cross she did gae.

About the middle of the night  
She heard the bridles ring;  
This lady was as glad at that  
As any earthly thing.

From Burns's practice, we can learn how the other ballad revisers of the eighteenth century worked. They were poets of taste who were close enough to folk-tradition to be able to adapt it without making it look literary or artificial.

Scott's case is rather different. He was both further away from folk-tradition and more influenced by Romantic ideas. I have already quoted his version of "The Twa Corbies" and tried to show what he did to that folksong. Scott left his manuscripts at Abbotsford, so that we can often see his material in its rough state before he polished it. The most interesting example of Scott's "editorial re-creation" is "Clerk Saunders" (69). The version that everyone knows from anthologies has been heavily worked over by Scott. Child printed the original MS. versions which, together with the tunes that have been collected, show that the ballad was first written in the Long Measure, that is, quatrains of four-foot lines. Scott was not interested in music, and he changed most of the stanzas into the more usual Common Measure, that is, quatrains of alternate 4 and 3 feet lines. The result is that his version simply does not fit any of the ballad's three fine tunes (given in Mr. Goss's *Ballads of Britain*). For example, one original stanza runs:

'For in it will come my seven brothers  
And a' their torches burning bright;  
They'll say, We hae but ae sister,  
And here her lying wi a knight.'

Scott alters the structure, and adds the literary adjective

"bold", which destroys the rhythm, and the unidiomatic "behold":

'For in may come my seven bauld brothers  
Wi torches burning bright  
They'll say we hae but ae sister  
And behold she's wi a knight.'

And the famous lines about the seventh brother are entirely Scott's invention:

Then up and got the seventh o' them,  
And never a word spake he;  
But he has striped his bright, brown brand  
Out through Clerk Saunder's fair body.

In the traditional version, the seventh brother says much the same as the others; his brand is not brown, and Clerk Saunders does not have a "fair" body.

Scott had little sense of editorial integrity; he could not resist the temptation to improve a ballad that came to him in an imperfect state. And the result is often very good poetry. We owe many of the best anthology pieces to Scott: "Kinmont Willie" is probably his entire invention\*; and his hand appears in "Thomas Rymer", "The Wife of Usher's Well" (79), and "The Douglas Tragedy" (7 B), which is full of magnificent Romantic rhetoric:

'Hold up, hold up, Lord William,' she says  
'For I fear that you are slain.'  
'Tis naething but the shadow of my scarlet cloak  
That shines in the water sae plain.'

Scott was helped in his collecting by James Hogg, the "Ettrick Shepherd", who, like Burns, was at once a countryman and a sophisticated literary man, author of the brilliant *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Hogg supplied some of the better ballad

\* Scott's former tutor wrote for "Kinmont Willie" a tune so lacking in folksong character that it would deceive few



versions. His mother, Margaret Laidlaw, was an unlettered folksinger, and it was she who spoke the famous words to Scott which make a fitting comment on his work: "There was never ane o' my songs prentit till ye prentit them yourself, and ye hae spoilt them a'together. They were made for singin' and no for readin', but ye hae broken the charm now, and they'll never be sung mair."

After this great period, there was a distinct decline of taste in the Scottish ballad versions. The country people went on singing the ballads in the nineteenth century, but the versions collected after 1800 show a coarsened sensibility. Although dramatic skill is often maintained, and although many primitive features are preserved in these versions, the diction has deteriorated and they lack the finish of the great "anthology" pieces of the eighteenth century. At the same time, the poets interested in ballads themselves moved further away from folk-tradition. Poems written in imitation of ballads during the nineteenth century are usually quite easy to distinguish. Editors, too, became nervous about interfering with ballad texts, especially after Child's scholarship set an example of integrity. There are only a few recent examples of a successful marriage of folk and learned literature, and they are of a different order to the work of Burns or Scott.

One such is a fine poem in the *Oxford Book of Ballads*, based on the folksong "Still Growing", which is quoted in Chapter I. This is a re-working of traditional material in nineteenth-century idiom, with a strong hint of Tennyson. The author makes the young wife the speaker throughout and neatly fits the third line of each stanza into a pattern:

2. O the rain on the roof, here and I must make my moan . . .
3. O the wind on the thatch, here and I alone must weep . . .
4. At the huffe of the gale, here I toss and I cannot sleep . . .
5. But the snow, snowflakes fall, O and I am chill as dead . . .
6. But the raven harshly croaks, and I shiver in my bed . . .
7. But the bell did only knell, and I shuddered as one cold . . .
8. And the daisies were outspread, and the buttercups of gold  
     O'er my pretty lad so young  
     Now ceased growing.

The diction in these lines and elsewhere—"In court and stall and stately hall, and bower of tapestry"—the internal rhymes, the repetitions, the frequency of the "I", and the literary flavour show that this version is by a sophisticated poet. Although he has used a slightly debased Romantic convention and creates a trance-like atmosphere he has succeeded in producing genuine poetry. It would be the meanest purism to complain of such a happy result.

## THE FOLKLORE OF THE BALLADS

BALLADS are only a small part of the immense volume of folk-literature<sup>1</sup> which has survived in the oral tradition of Europe. They are found alongside lyrical folksongs, fairytales, merry tales, animal fables, proverbs, riddles, and so on. There are thousands of *motifs* which are shared by the folklore of every country and which move from one genre to another. The ballads do not stand entirely distinct from the other genres. They have in common with fairytales the use of fixed formulas and of incremental repetition, particularly in groups of three, and a fondness for rich ornament in the description of heroes and heroines. Some ballads resemble merry tales, those stories of reversals and deceptions which have circulated throughout Europe and which receive their greatest literary expression in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*. Many of the merry tales are of Oriental origin, like Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, or the subject of the ballads: "The Friar in the Well" (276), and "The Farmer's Curs'd Wife" (278), and some were recorded centuries before Christ. They appear again in mediæval fabliaux and preachers' *exempla*, in the stories told by peasants, and some have persisted up to the present day and are circulating in officers' messes and bars. "The Keach in the Creel" (281), has the story of the spying parent jolted in a basket, a typical merry tale. The girl's lover is let down into her room in a basket, the parent stumbles into it, and is jolted about by the lovers' accomplice. He thinks that the devil has got him and leaves the lovers in peace. The story is found in a French fabliau of the fourteenth century, and in tone and construction it is like the material Chaucer used for some of his tales. "Get Up and Bar the Door" (275) has a story found in Italian (Straparola, sixteenth century), French (D'Ourville, seventeenth century) Arabic, and Turkish. Husband and wife fall out over shutting

the door; they agree that the first to speak shall shut it; both remain silent when intruders eat up their food, and it is only when the intruders propose to kiss the wife and shave the husband's beard that the latter speaks in protest:

'Then up and started our good wife,  
Gied three skips on the floor, O:  
'Goodman, you've spoken the foremost word  
Get up and bar the door, O.' '

As an example of another type of folktale which is found in our ballads, there is the Accused Queen *motif*, which has a wide distribution in Europe.<sup>2</sup> Combined with the *motif* of unexpected deliverance by a small champion, it forms the basis for "Sir Aldingar" (59). Again, the Loathly Lady who is transformed by a kiss (compare *The Wife of Bath's Tale*) is found in a group of ballads: "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (31), "Kemp Owyne" (34), "Allison Gross" (35).

Nevertheless, the ballads do show certain differences from other types of oral literature. They usually lack the happy ending of the fairy tales, and didacticism of the typical folk-legend and animal fable. The ballads which resemble merry tales are found mainly among the small group of comic songs at the end of Child's collection. Most ballads are based on an even simpler situation than that of the folktale, and they are typically amoral and tragic. The English and Scottish ballads are peculiarly rich in one kind of folklore, that of the supernatural. Although so many of the ballads were first recorded at a comparatively late date, and although so many show signs of sophisticated rewriting, yet the corpus of Child's Ballads does contain an extraordinary number of primitive survivals, *motifs* which seem to be connected with beliefs and practices of great antiquity. It is not easy to say just how close the connection is, or to explain why these survivals are found in ballads of such recent date. Before that question can be considered, it will be necessary to examine in outline this characteristic ballad folklore. The material has been summarized and discussed in an admirable work by L. C. Wimberly.<sup>3</sup>

The ballad universe is peopled with animals and birds that speak, with fairies and witches, and with ghosts who return from the grave. There is no clear line of demarcation between such creatures and ordinary mortals. The supernatural is treated in a matter-of-fact and unsensational way, and to the ballad singer there seems to be no question of a suspension of disbelief. Fairies, for example, are not the minute creatures of modern whimsy, but are like human beings in size and in some of their ways of life. They wear green ("Thomas Rymer" (37)), live in forests ("Tam Lin" (39)), own fairy castles inside hills ("Hind Etin" (41)), and "The Elfin Knight sat on yon hill" (2), or in an underworld beneath the ground ("Thomas Rymer"). They seek mortals as nurses for their children ("The Queen of the Elfan's Nourice" (40)), as lovers ("Lady Isabel and the Elf knight" (4)), or as sacrificial victims. At the end of every seven years, they must sacrifice one of their number as a tribute to hell, and they prefer to use a mortal as a substitute. Tam Lin has been stolen away by the fairies, and he asks Janet to win him back, saying:

'And pleasant is the fairy land  
But, an eerie tale to tell,  
Ay at the end of seven years  
We pay a teind to hell,  
I am sae fair and fu o flesh  
I'm feard it be mysel.'

(39)

Except in "The Wee, Wee Man" (38), and in one other ballad, fairies are shown as having the same size as mortals. They differ from mortals in their greater magical powers, and in the magnificence of their horses, jewellery, and apparel:

'Her skirt was of the grass-green silk,  
Her mantel of the velvet fine,  
At ilka tett of her horse's mane  
Hung fifty siller bells and nine.

("Thomas Rymer" (37).)

Fairies in folklore generally seem to have had human characteristics until Shakespeare popularized the modern

conception of them in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, though in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he implies that the fairies who dance round Herne the Hunter are life-sized.

Fairies in the ballads and in other folklore are closely associated with ghosts, who are described in the same semi-human terms. They are not disembodied spirits in the accepted sense, for in most cases the "ghost" is the actual corpse:

'And at the back o merry Lincoln  
The dead corpse did her meet.'  
(*"Sir Hugh"* (155 A).)

or the lover returns without arms because

'By worms they're eaten, in mools they're rotten  
Behold, Margaret, and see.'  
(*"Sweet William's Ghost"* (77 F).)

"Ghosts" is the wrong word for these corporeal beings, who rise from their unquiet graves: revenants, returners, would be a better description. They are described in material and human terms as the fairies are, and they, also, have dealings with mortals, as Sweet William does in the most moving of all visits:

'Are ye sleeping, Margret,' he says,  
'Or are ye waking, presentlie?  
Give me my faith and trouthe again,  
A wat, trewe love, I gied to thee.'

'Your faith and trouth ye's never get,  
Nor our true love shall never twain,  
Till ye come with me in my bower,  
And kiss me both cheek and chin.'

'My mouth it is full cold, Margret,  
It has the smell now of the ground,  
And I kiss thy comely mouth,  
Thy life-days will not be long.'

(77 B)

These ghosts can eat and drink as mortals do:

'It fell about the Martinmass,  
When the nights are lang and mirk,  
The Carlin's wife's three sons came hame,  
And their hats were o the birk.

"Blow up the fire, my maidens,  
Bring water from the well,  
For a' my house shall feast this night,  
Since my three sons are well'."

They return sometimes because the tears of the living will not let them rest in their unquiet graves, sometimes to comfort their parents, sometimes to reprove the vanity of the living ("Proud Lady Margaret" (47)), and sometimes to punish their crimes ("The Cruel Mother" (20)). This almost materialist treatment of death and separation gives the ballads their special intensity and pathos.

At times the dead are as malevolent as the fairies; there may be a taboo on kissing them, as in "Sweet William's Ghost". The likeness between fairies and ghosts appears also in the descriptions of their dwelling-places. As Wimberly says: "The conception that the Otherworld does not extend beyond the grave-mound or barrow" is found side by side with the "belief in a general realm beyond the tomb."<sup>4</sup> Fairies are often associated with tombs. The barrows left by an early civilization are sometimes called fairy hills, and, as Scott says, the fairies habitually "inhabit the interior of green hills, chiefly those in a conical form, in the Gaelic termed Sighan". On the other hand, there is a fairy kingdom in "Thomas Rymer", an other-world beneath the ground, separated from this world by a water barrier:

'For forty days and forty nights  
He wade thro red blude to the knee,  
And he saw neither sun nor moon  
But heard the roaring of the sea.'

Similarly, in some ballads, future life is associated only with the grave "where the channering worm doth chide". The dead's belongings are buried with them in "The Twa Brothers" (49) and in "Sir Hugh" (155). In most versions of "Sweet William's Ghost", there is no mention of Heaven or Hell, and the dead lover returns from a literal grave:

'There's no room at my side, Margret  
My coffins' made so meet.'

Yet in other ballads, the dead are spoken of as passing to a separate otherworld. This appears as a mountain in "The Demon Lover" (243):

'O whaten a mountain is yon,' she said,  
'All so dreary wi' frost and snow?'  
'O yon is the mountain of hell,' he cried,  
'Where you and I will go.'

and the water barrier is found in the "Lykewake Dirge":

'From Whinny-moor that thou mayst pass,  
Every night and all,  
To Brig o' Dread thou comest at last  
And Christ receive thy soul.'

and in "Johnie Cock" (114):

'They wad ride the fords of hell.'

Ballad cosmology is, on the whole, surprisingly free from references to Christian beliefs. There are a few exceptions to this, like the description of paths of righteousness and wickedness in "Thomas Rymer" ("that braid, braid road, That lies across yon lillie leven"), and the stanza in "Sweet William's Ghost" where Margret is told about women who die in childbirth:



'Their beds are made in the heavens high,  
 Down at the foot of our good Lord's knee,  
 Well set about wi gilly flowers  
 A wat sweet company for to see.'

But such passages are so rare as to seem like late intrusions into ballad folklore. There is no systematic mythology or cosmology in the ballads, as is shown by the confusion between ghosts and fairies and the contradictory ideas about the other-world. The ballads express only fragments of primitive beliefs, though they do so in a literal and convincing way.

Fairies and the dead are not the only beings with supernatural powers in the ballads. Human beings themselves have magical abilities. Witches can transform maidens into serpents:

'She's turnd me into an ugly worm  
 And gard me toddle about the tree',  
 ("Allison Gross" (35).)

or into Loathly Ladies, as the malignant stepmother does in the "Marriage of Sir Gawain" (31). In "Willie's Lady" (6), the mother uses the black art to prevent her daughter-in-law's childbirth, and she is countered by a friendly household spirit, the Belly Blind:

'Oh wha has loosed the nine witch knots  
 That was amo that ladie's locks?

'And wha has taen out the kaims\* of care  
 That hangs amo that ladie's hair?

'And wha's taen down the bush o woodbine  
 That hangs atween her bower and mine?

'And wha has killd the master kid  
 That ran beneath that ladie's bed?

'And wha has loosed her left-foot shee†  
 And lotten that ladie lighter be?'

\* Combs.

† Shoe.

Several modes of disenchantment are mentioned: by drawing blood, by a kiss, by holding the enchanted person through successive transformations, by bathing in water or in milk, by naming and by music. There are a great many magic objects in the ballads, as can be seen from Stith Thompson's *Motif Index*: a magic thorn which produces sleep ("Sir Cawline" (61)), a magic ring in "Hind Horn" ((17): "Whan that ring turns pale and wan, You may ken that your love loves anither man"), magic love-producing music, charms to preserve chastity and so on. There are taboos, not only on relations with supernatural beings or on eating in fairyland: one is that a man is not to be present at childbirth. The heroine of "Leesome Brand" says:

'When I endure my grief and pain  
My companie ye maun refrain.' (15 A, 26.)

and in another version of that ballad, there seems to be a reference to sympathetic magic, the releasing of an arrow to help the birth:

'When ye hear me give a cry  
Ye'll shoot your bow and let me lye.' (15 B, 4.)

Name-magic is found in the "riddle ballads". The devil may be exorcized by naming him, as in the contest between the maiden and the unearthly knight told in "Riddles Wisely Expounded":

. . . 'And Clootie's waur nor a woman was.'

As sune as she the fiend did name  
He flew awa in a blazing flame. (I C, 18-19.)

The riddle ballads show a battle of wits between supernatural beings and mortals. The former ask riddles and set impossible tasks, the latter win by answering the riddles, or by producing equally impossible counter-tasks, wielding the magic of words by their quickness of wit and fluency. Another

type of name-magic, known as "dead-naming", or the "name-soul", lies behind "Earl Brand" (7) and "Erlinton" (8). It can be seen more clearly in the Danish analogue to this ballad, "Ribold and Guldborg". Ribold has abducted Guldborg and is pursued by her father and brothers. When he turns to fight them he tells her on no account to speak his name. She obeys until her youngest brother only is left alive, and she calls upon Ribold by name to spare him; and then:

‘The moment Guldborg named his name  
A fatal blow, the deathblow came.’

The importance given to the name is found in many primitive cultures: in some of them people do not speak their true names in case they fall into an enemy's power. This *motif* has become obscured in the English versions, probably because the belief was no longer understood. There is only a trace left in "Erlinton":

‘And see that ye never change your cheer  
Until ye see my body bleed.’ (8 B, 14.)

There is a trace of name magic in "The Hunting of the Cheviot" (162 A, 16), in "Child Waters" (63 A), and Tam Lin has a fairy name by using which his sweetheart saves him.

Animals and birds that speak and behave in a human way are found in the ballads. In some cases they are human beings who have been magically transformed, as in "Leesome Brand":

‘Be sure ye touch not the white hynde,  
For she is o the women kind.’ (15 A, 28.)

and in the broadside version of the "Three Ravens" (26) where the fallow doe seems to be the dead knight's lover. In other cases, a belief in the transmigration of souls is implied. In "Young Hunting" (68), the bonny bird who addresses the murderess is probably a reincarnation of the victim. This *motif* appears in modern American versions, as in one recently collected in Tennessee:

'And up then spoke the little parrot bird  
Exceeding on his tree  
"What's become of the knight with the pretty painted cloak  
You rode with down to the sea?"

"Hush up your beak, you little parrot bird  
Tell none of your tales on me,  
And your cage shall be of fine, red gold  
With its spokes of ivory,"<sup>5</sup>

Talking birds appear in half a dozen other ballads, and in the "Broomfield Hill" (43) there are also helpful animals. In these there is no *motif* of transformation or reincarnation. The background is rather that intuitive sympathy between man and beast which is found throughout folklore, the sense of oneness which lies behind the animal fables. "Johnie Cock" (114) talks as if there were no essential differences between men and animals: animals would have been more sympathetic than his enemies who attacked him as he slept:

'The wildest wolf in aw this wood  
Wad not ha done so by me;  
She'd ha wet her foot ith wan water  
And sprinkled it oer my brae,\*  
And if that wad not he wakend me,  
She wad ha gone and let me be.'

Not only animals but inanimate objects have the power of speech and intelligence. Bed and blankets speak to "Gil Brenton" (5), Johnie Cock addresses his bows as if they were human, and there is an intelligent ship in "Young Allan" (245) as in some Danish ballads. In "Bonnie Annie" (24), the ship refuses to move because there is a guilty person on board.

'There's fey fowk in our ship, she winna sail for me.'

In "The Twa Sisters" or "Binnorie" (10), the *motif* of the Singing Bone is found. A viol is made from the bones and hair of the drowned sister and it tells of the crime:

\* Brow.

'And then bespake the strings all three,  
O yonder is my sister that drowned mee.'  
(10 A, 16.)

Like some of the talking birds, this implies a belief in reincarnation; or, as Wimberly calls it, the "object-soul". The clearest example of reincarnation, however, is that of lovers' souls going into plants which grow from their graves, as in Earl Brand:

Lord William was buried in St. Mary's kirk,  
Lady Margaret in Mary's quire,  
Out o the lady's grave grew a bonny red rose,  
And out of the knight's a briar.

This *motif* is repeated in half a dozen other ballads, as a fitting end to a tragic love story. It is still a favourite with modern American ballad singers:

'Sweet William was buried in the old church tomb  
Barbara Ellen was buried in the yard.  
Out of sweet William's grave grew a green, red rose  
Out of Barbara Ellen's a briar.

'They grew and they grew to the tall church door;  
They could not grow any higher.  
They linked and tied in a true lover's knot  
And the rose grew round the briar.'<sup>8</sup>

A number of ballad *motifs* centre upon the magical virtues of blood, perhaps because it, too, was once regarded as a vehicle of the soul. Johnie Cock and his dogs drink the blood of the deer, and that is probably a relic of contagious magic: they do so that the swiftness of the deer may be transferred to them. In "The Braes of Yarrow" (214), the blood of the slain man is drunk, apparently for the same reason:

'She kisssd his cheek, she kairnd his hair,  
As oft she did before, O;  
She drank the red blood frae him ran,  
On the dowy houms o Yarrow.'

—an incident which Scott cut out of his version.

The more sinister *motif* of curative blood<sup>7</sup> on which a number of legends are founded, appears once in the ballads. The lazar in "Sir Aldingar" (59), is healed of his leprosy by standing under a gallows-tree. In "Young Hunting" (68 C, 23), the corpse bleeds on the approach of the slayer:

'White, white waur his wounds washen  
As white as any lawn;  
But sune's the traitor stude before  
Then out the red blude sprang.'

Finally, in three ballads, "Lamkin" (93), "Little Musgrave" (87), and "Sir Hugh" ((155), three versions only), there is a blood *motif* which has been variously interpreted. In each, the killer catches the blood of the slain in a bowl to avoid spilling it upon the ground, and in each case, the vessel is of precious metal, or scoured clean, the *motif* is clearly preserved in the modern version of Lamkin quoted in Chapter V:

'Go scour the silver basin  
Go scour it nice and clean  
To hold the lady's heartblood  
For she comes of noble kin.'

Wimberly<sup>8</sup> suggests that this practice implies "the idea that the blood is the vehicle of the soul"—an idea found elsewhere in folklore—in support of which he quotes from Deuteronomy, "the blood is the life", and a stanza from "Sir Hugh" (155):

'Then out and cam the thick, thick blood,  
Then out and cam the thin,  
Then out and cam the bonny heart's blood  
Where a' the life lay in.'

Gerould,<sup>9</sup> on the other hand, suggests that "blood, as the principle of life, had some occult virtue and might be preserved with advantage by the enemy who had killed a person". Miss Gilchrist<sup>10</sup> thinks that the Lamkin stanza is connected with the old superstition, of unknown foundation, against shedding noble or innocent blood upon the ground. For the former, she refers to Frazer's *Golden Bough*,<sup>11</sup> where instances are collected of the "common rule that royal blood may not be shed upon the ground"; for the latter, she refers to a Manx ballad which tells how white blankets were spread on the ground at a patriot's execution. Whatever the explanation, the blood-motif gives the killing in "Lamkin" a sacrificial and ritual character. In "Sir Hugh", the murder is explicitly ritual, for the story is founded on the well-known anti-Semitic legend which was so widespread in the Middle Ages and is told in Chaucer's "Prioress's Tale". "Lamkin" is more obscure, but may perhaps have the same kind of *motif* behind it, as may also be surmised from the fact that the lady is killed with a bodkin of silver.

In these, and in a few other ballads, we may catch sight of a dark and primitive layer of belief and practice. The *motif* of the fairies' tribute to hell, paid at the end of every seven years, may also have some connection with the ritual murder of the divine kings made familiar to us by the *Golden Bough*. Frazer has explained how the fertilization spirit is thought of as embodied in the king; when his potency fails, he is put to death and succeeded by another. Later a substitute victim is chosen, who enjoys the privileges of a king for a short time before he is sacrificed. Finally, the actual slaying dies out and there remains only a Mock King and a Mock Death at an annual festival. Frazer has shown how this pattern at various stages of its evolution is found in many parts of the world. It would be hard to prove that the ritual murder of the divine king actually survived in mediæval Europe, though that has been suggested. But folk-memory is extremely tenacious. Sir Edmund Chambers has shown<sup>12</sup> how the mummers preserved the pattern of the Mock Death, and possibly some such reality lies behind the *motif* of the fairies'

sacrifice in "Tam Lin", and behind the curious ballad "Young Benjie" (86). In the latter, the treatment given to the false lover is like that given to a substitute king, that is, royal luxury until the end of the sacrificial cycle. Young Benjie entices Marjorie away and drowns her; her brothers find her in the river, and at the wake, the corpse, caused to speak by leaving the door ajar, denounces the murderer:

'Tie a green gravat about his neck  
And lead him out and in  
And the best ae servant about your house  
To wait Young Benjie upon.

'And aye at every seven year's end  
Ye'll tak him to the linn  
For that's the penance he maun dree  
To scug his deadly sin.'

This kind of human sacrifice is found elsewhere in folklore, and also in associations with fairies. In the witch trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of the accused testified to having relations with the fairies and to learning their arts from them, and the cyclical sacrifice is mentioned. Sometimes it was at the end of seven years, but Alison Pearson, executed in 1586, testified that the tribute was annual. She said that one William Sympson, who had been taken away by the fairies, "bidd her sign herself that she be not taken away, for the teind of them are taken away to hell everie year". The witches said that they themselves kept the practice of sacrificing human victims, round whose neck they would tie a ceremonial cord (compare the line in "Young Benjie": "Tie a green gravat round his neck"). The witches evidently regarded the fairies as real people, practising an ancient religion. The connection between fairies and witches is often made in folklore; for example, the witches held one of their quarterly Sabbaths on Halloween, the old festival of Samhain, that is the traditional night on which the fairies ride about and hold their ceremonies:



'But the night is Halloween, lady . . .  
Just at the mirk and midnight hour  
The fairy folk will ride.'

("Tam Lin".)

Now it has been suggested by Miss Margaret Murray<sup>13</sup> that a good deal of the evidence of the witch trials should be taken at its face value; that the witch cult was a late form of pagan religion which persisted throughout the Middle Ages; and, further, that the fairies were a real people. According to this theory, the fairies were a people of Stone Age culture, pushed into outlying areas by the invading Celts and Saxons. They practised hunting and used stone arrows (elf-shot), they wore green for camouflage, and their power of appearing and disappearing suddenly was simply the fieldcraft in which all hunting peoples are adept; and among them the ancient sacrificial religion survived. This is not the place to discuss the possible truth of these theories, beyond saying that it is unlikely that such a primitive people really did survive in Mediæval Europe. Fairies have such a close connection in folklore with ghosts that the memory of a primitive people cannot be their only point of origin. The most that can be said is that behind the fairies of the ballads and of other types of folklore may lie the memory of an ancient society and religion. We can catch sight of the distant past in the fragmentary evidence that has survived the ballads.

The *motifs* which I have outlined may be interpreted in several ways. Some are genuine survivals from the past and they owe their existence to the tenacity of folk-memory: *motifs* may have been genuinely based on primitive beliefs and then pass from one generation to another until they have become almost meaningless (like the name-soul in "Earl Brand", the transformation in "The Three Ravens", and the traces of human sacrifice). Others, however, are not to be taken at their face value. As A. H. Krappe has pointed out,<sup>14</sup> they may be literary rather than anthropological *motifs*, based on other forms of folktale rather than on actual belief. The sympathetic plants that grew from the lovers' graves form

almost certainly a *motif* of this kind. Wimberly suggests that it may originally have come from a literal belief in reincarnation and the plant-soul; but long before it appears in any ballad it was part of the Irish story of Deirdre and Grainne and, more significantly, of the Tristan romance which, from the twelfth century to the present day has been the best known of all the romances, translated and adapted into almost every language of Europe. The Singing Bone in "The Twa Sisters" (10) is a *motif* found in a number of fairy tales and is said to have originated in India, where a belief in transmigration exists: this ballad drew from oral literature rather than directly from folk belief.

But in other cases, folklore *motifs* in the ballads are neither primitive nor literary. The beliefs on which they rest were actually current at the time and place of collection. For example, the taboo on a man's presence at childbirth which is found in "Leesome Brand" and its Danish analogues, was certainly far from meaningless when these ballads were collected, and it has been reported as still active in country districts in this century. Many other *motifs* can be paralleled by current superstitions. A large number of primitive practices and beliefs persisted through the Middle Ages and into modern times in the remote country districts of England and Scotland. There was an immense growth of folklore round the witch cult of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. It is probable that a good deal of paganism lingered among the peasantry, and, in Scotland, even the upper classes were not above suspicion. Child comments on the ballad "Northumberland Betrayed by Douglas" (176): "Witchcraft was rife at the epoch of this ballad, nor was the imputation of it confined to hags of humble life. The Lady Buccleugh, the Countess of Athole and the Lady Foulis were all accused of practising the black art." The Scottish ballad versions, which have much more of the supernatural in them than the English ones have, are at least to some extent a reflection of actual life and thought.

Christianity does not appear to have modified the background of the Scottish ballad versions. Although the super-

natural is so much manifest, there are almost none of the orthodox miracles or legends of the Virgin Mary and the Saints which make up such a large part of mediæval literature. "Brown Robyn's Confession" (57) and "Sir Hugh or the Jew's Daughter" (155) are the only examples. The Robin Hood ballads are more devout. Robin receives the Virgin Mary's help in the fourth Fitt of the "Gest" (117), and forces proud priests to say mass for him. There are also the few ballads, like "The Cherry Tree Carol", on religious subjects. Elsewhere, the Church has left little trace beyond a recurrent formula:

'When bells were rung and mass was sung  
And men were bound for bed.'

## SOME BALLAD COMMUNITIES

THE ballads are a record of social history, and many of them reflect a distinctive type of community and a distinctive set of social values. The early background to all European ballads is apparently roughly the same, a "small, stable, and self-sufficient" community as described by Entwistle in his *European Balladry*.<sup>1</sup> He quotes as a classical example that found in the Serbian mountains where the "heroic form of poetry and society has persisted". The social unit is the small one of the "tribe or family state". It is an aristocratic society, but "the criterion of aristocracy is personal prowess; allegiance is given to a leader who joins birth to valour. . . . Raids on traditional enemies, vendettas, marriage under the figure of bride-stealing, and calamitous battles make up the stuff, not only of entertainment, but of instruction. . . ." This type of community can only exist where government is localized, as in mountainous or border districts. Entwistle says of Serbia that "on the plains the heroic ballad is no longer at home, and traditional songs are cultivated chiefly by the women in their dances" (whereas the ballad seems to be a predominantly masculine art). The ballad community is essentially mediæval, in contrast not only to modern but to pre-mediæval society like that of the wandering Germanic peoples. The latter had their own distinctive kind of poetry, the heroic epic, which is national in that it is about the leaders of the whole people; whereas the ballad is local, and deals only with the affairs of a small, static group. Ballads do not begin anywhere in Europe until the mass migrations are over.

The Serbian community is still mediæval and is very like the society described by the Spanish ballads of the frontier and by the Danish ballads. The latter society has been admirably summarized by Axel Olrik.<sup>2</sup> The heroes of the Danish ballads and the people who were the patrons of ballad-

singers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were small squires. They were gentlemen-farmers of good family rather than high nobles, and their relations with the court, the church, and the town were distant. There was no highly developed feudal system and the "fatherland" does not appear as a concept. (Nationalist feeling is expressed only in a few, comparatively late, ballads.) The action nearly always centres on the "knight's" homestead or "garth". The setting is a group of wattle-and-daub buildings around the main house, with its outside gallery giving access to the "high-loft" and the "maidens' bower". The squires or "swains" are pictured as working on the farm and as going with the knight to war; some are the younger sons of the nobility, some peasant born. It is an aristocratic society in which there is no considerable gap, in way of life or in taste, between the leaders and the people. Blood-feuds and abduction by force are the themes of many ballads; the cause of tragedy is often intense family pride. The hero is usually the "squire of dames", the virtues most admired are vitality and the strength to win a bride against opposition. Heroines are fierce and practical and, unlike the ladies of mediæval courtly poetry, they are seen taking part in the everyday life of the farm. The dance, to which the ballads were sung, was the main pastime of the whole community.

The background to the English and Scottish ballads is harder to reconstruct from the texts because we have not as homogeneous a collection as the Danish. But much the same conditions seem to have prevailed in the two areas most closely associated with certain kinds of English and Scottish ballads: Sherwood Forest and the Scottish Borders. Whatever the reality of Robin Hood and whatever his date, the ballads about him do at least contain a vivid folk memory of guerilla warfare under heroic conditions, of outlaws banded under a leader to whom they have sworn allegiance, killing the king's deer and defying the central authority; and they contain, perhaps, a memory of dispossessed Saxons resisting the Norman usurpers, in a combination of class and national warfare. Robin Hood, as Child says, lives by "levies on the

superfluity of the higher orders, secular and spiritual . . . but harms no husbandman or yeoman and is friendly to poor men generally, imparting to them of what he takes from the rich". The Robin Hood ballads are Yeoman minstrelsy and not aristocratic as the Danish ballads are, yet they express much the same code.

A closer parallel to the Danish and Serbian background is found in the Scottish Borders and in Aberdeenshire in the sixteenth century, where the ideal conditions for producing ballads obtained. Sir Walter Scott has described the border society in his *Minstrelsy*.<sup>3</sup> The borderers were organized in small groups, largely on a family basis, under their lairds, Johnstons, Maxwells, Armstrongs, and Elliots. The eastern marches were comparatively civilized, "but on the middle and western marches, the inhabitants were unrestrained moss-troopers and cattle-drivers, knowing no measure of law," says Camden, "but the length of their swords". They did not cultivate the land to any great extent, since they were always likely to lose their crops when the English made a raid. Their chief property was cattle and they lived by stealing cattle. So did the English borderers and therefore "robbery assumed the appearance of fair reprisal". They were under little control from the central government, and the warden of the marches, who was supposed to keep order, was entitled to retaliate on the English by a border raid. He himself was often a border laird and his followers were simply moss-troopers who carried out their raiding under legal authority. The borderers had little national feeling; they called their king the king of Lothian, a part of Scotland from which they were banished. Their allegiance was only given to the chiefs of their name who exercised a rule which, as Scott says, was "partly patriarchal and partly feudal". The chiefs were powerful but not wealthy; payment of rent was hardly known in the borders until the seventeenth century; and the chiefs' wealth consisted "chiefly in herds of cattle which were consumed by the kinsmen, vassals, and followers who aided him to acquire and to protect them". As in other ballad societies, blood-feuds were common, and vengeance would be taken against an entire family. The

central point in the borderers' morality was their faithfulness to their word. To religion they seem to have been indifferent. Though they showed little respect for the great Border Abbeys, they remained Roman Catholic rather longer than the rest of Scotland. Their paganism was notorious, especially their belief in magic spells. Scott quotes Bishop Nicholson, writing in the early eighteenth century about "the natural superstition of our borderers at this day, who are much better acquainted with and do more firmly believe, their old legendary stories of fairies and witches, than the articles of the creed".

The group of Border ballads, which includes "Willie Mackintosh", "Dick o the Cow", "Jock o the side", "Jamie Telfer in the Fair Dodhead", and "Hobie Noble", shows a fairly close reflection of this *maquis* life, although Scott's romanticism sometimes colours the versions he printed. They are about cattle-stealing and rescues from gaol; deception is praised as highly as valour; family loyalty and pride are paramount:

Wee are brothers childer nine or ten,  
And sisters children ten or eleven.  
We neuer came to the feild to fight,  
But the worst of us was counted a man.

(187 A, 24.)

"Johnie Cock" (114), vaguer in setting and richer in folklore, is based on the blood-feud, perhaps of an earlier period.

Aberdeenshire, the county most fertile in ballad versions, seems to have had very similar conditions in the sixteenth century, as can be seen from the background to "Edom o Gordon" (178), another great ballad about the blood-feud. The story comes from an incident in the struggle between the Gordons and their rival clan, the Forbes. In 1571, Adam Gordon sent Captain Thomas against one of the Forbes houses. The lady refused to surrender and was burnt with her household. Another Aberdeenshire feud is recorded in "The Fire of Frendraught" (196).

Altogether, nearly 60 of Child's 305 ballads are about violent incidents, forays, and feats of arms, and most of these

are local rather than national. The horizon of the Scottish ballads is not a distant one. Sometimes kings and queens are the subject, but, as Entwistle says of the Danish ballads, kings are described as "magnified squires, all their acts and feelings being on a personal scale".<sup>4</sup>

Even more common than guerilla warfare as a theme is sex: nearly half the ballads are stories of love or of violence caused by love. The ballads take a simple view of sex, uncomplicated by Christian ethics or by mediæval Courtly Love—the latter was the ethic of a far more highly organized society. Bride-stealings are common, and the maiden is usually willing to elope. Love is set in a context of social relationships: the father and seven bold brothers stand in the way, and lovers consult their relatives for advice which usually leads to tragedy. As in folksong and folklore everywhere, the cuckold gets no sympathy. Gerould says "marital unhappiness is almost always lightly treated in the ballads unless it ends in homicide"<sup>5</sup>; as, of course, it often does.

The ballads present love and violence in the same matter-of-fact way as the supernatural. The least possible comment is offered. The ballad community has its own set of moral values: individual prowess in arms and in love is perhaps the quality most admired; then comes loyalty, both in allegiance to a leader and in the plighting of a lover's troth. But this morality remains implicit. The absence of didacticism in the ballads makes a strong contrast both with mediæval clerkly literature and with other types of folklore, like the animal fable and the proverb, and perhaps distinguishes them as an aristocratic type of folklore. Just as there is only a very small amount of Christian hagiology or cosmology in the ballads, so there is a minimum of orthodox moralizing. According to Steenstrup,<sup>6</sup> a moral is pointed out only in the later Danish ballad versions, and what little moralizing there is in the English and Scottish ballads seems to be intrusive. It has been suggested by John Speirs in *The Scottish Tradition*, that some of the ballads are moralist in their use of the symbol of finery; that the lords and ladies adorned with the silk and the gold so red personify vanity, and that the finery is associated with folly, pride, and



death. I do not, however, believe that this is the right interpretation. The rich adornment of heroes and heroines is found universally in folklore as well as in epic poetry and in romances. Formalized splendour is what ballad singers admire and usually without reservations. It has not a moral, but a pathetic effect: the images of grandeur, fairy or mortal, embodying the strongest fantasies of the community, are contrasted with "the earthiness of death and decay"—as Speirs himself points out. The moralist interpretation does appear in one version of "Proud Lady Margaret" (47 E):

Leave pride, Margret, leave pride, Margret,  
 Leave pride and vanity . . .  
 O ye come in at the kirk door  
 Wi the gowd plaits in your hair:  
 But wud ye see what I have seen  
 Ye maun them a' forbear.

But this exhortation is not found in all the versions of the ballad and it is paralleled by few other ballads. I suspect that Scott may be partly responsible for this interpretation of finery: he himself wrote some excellent moralist poems in the ballad style, like "From the Red Gold Keep Thy Finger", and his masterpiece, "Proud Maisie".

Other survivals of the past can be traced in the ballads, some perhaps antedating the typical community of the late Middle Ages. In "Edward" (13), a married man still lives with his mother, and when Johnie Cock (114) is dying, it is to his mother he sends for help. The man's mother has great authority in the ballad household, as in "Willie's Lady" (6), "Lord Randal" (12), and others. In "Johnie Cock" and elsewhere, there are a number of references to the sister's son as a man's next of kin. These *motifs*, taken together, may point to a matrilineal social organization of great antiquity. But here, also, as Krappe says,<sup>7</sup> care must be taken in interpreting the evidence: the sister's son may be not a proof of actual custom but a formula borrowed from epic tradition.

Blood brotherhood, a custom of great antiquity, is found in two ballads: in "Adam Bell" (116), where three brothers

go into a forest where they "swore them brethren upon a day", and in "Bewick and Graham" (211), in which the sworn brethren are forced to fight by their fathers' quarrel. The ceremony of swearing brotherhood, like the other blood *motifs*, may have originally implied the belief that the soul resides in the blood<sup>8</sup>; but the custom must have survived the belief. The ceremony is not described in the ballads, but the binding nature of the oath remains.

Other traditions, which may be called legal, have left their mark. "Glasgeryon swore a full great othe By oake and ashe and thorne" (67 A) refers not directly to a tree cult, but to a legal form which is apparently found in German balladry.<sup>9</sup> The ordeal by fire is found in "Young Hunting" (68): the murderess's maiden is put in the fire, but since she is innocent

'It wad na take upon her cheeks  
nor take upon her chin . . .'

but the murderess herself burns:

'Out they have tain her May Catheren,  
And they hay put that lady in;  
O it took upon her cheek, her cheek,  
And it took upon her chin,  
And it took upon her fair body,  
She burnt like hoky-gren.\*

Burning as a punishment for adultery or incest is mentioned in several ballads, as, for example, "Sir Aldingar" (59). This ballad has also the *motif* of ordeal by battle: the accused queen is delivered from the flames by a champion who fights to prove her innocence. The punishment of fratricide by exposure in an open boat which lies in the background of "Edward" has already been mentioned; the fact that it is obscured in most versions shows that its legal foundation has been forgotten.

Such was the community which some of the ballads describe and by which some were produced. Although it is aristocratic, it is fairly homogeneous: the rulers have little esoteric culture,

\* ? "Embers" or "holly".

few secrets to be kept from the ruled. At one stage in their history the ballads seem at once to have been an aristocratic art and to have belonged to the whole people.

In the course of time the ballads went down the social scale, as the tastes of the upper classes changed and drew further away from those of the peasantry. This change appears in "Edward", where the castle, hawk, and hounds of the archetype are replaced by a "peasant" setting in the modern American and Scandinavian versions. The traditional ballad became mainly a peasant art, but never wholly so, since, as I have tried to show, broadsides and sophisticated handling have interfered with so many of them.

The ballads have never completely died out in this country, but it is to America that we must turn to find a community where they have survived as a dominant art. The classic area is in the Southern Highlands of the United States, described by many collectors including Cecil Sharp.<sup>10</sup> The people of these mountains are mostly illiterate. They are poor but economically independent, cut off from urban civilization by poor communications. Sharp describes them as leisurely, cheerful, and sociable: "they have the easy, unaffected bearing and the unselfconscious manners of the well bred". He was told that in past days there had been blood-feuds, pursued for several generations between members of certain families. Sharp praises their leisure, their rich cultural heritage and the intense interest everyone in the community takes in their main art, the folksong. There are specialists who know more songs and sing them better than other people, but everyone sings. "So closely indeed is the practice of this particular art interwoven with . . . everyday life, that singers, unable to recall a song I had asked for would often make a remark such as: 'Oh, if only I were driving the cows I could sing it at once.' "

These conditions are still partly mediæval and they seem to be necessary for the ballads' survival. The most important condition is that the singers should take the ballads seriously as stories, true stories about real people. Sharp says about the ballad singers: ". . . when singing a ballad . . . he is merely

relating a story in a particularly effective way that he has learned from his elders, his conscious attention being wholly concentrated upon what he is singing and not on the effect which he is himself producing". And evidence even more revealing comes from a recent collector in the Appalachians. The Americans have a ballad called "The Seven Sleepers", a version of "Earl Brand" (7), which ultimately derives from ancient Germanic epic. One old man told the collector: "The Seven Sleepers was a true song. It happened way back yonder in Mutton Hollow. I was there myself. Somebody got killed over the girl. I was there soon after it happened. Another man was after the girl and one man shot him."<sup>11</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BALLADS AND LITERATURE

THE ballads have taken a great deal from learned literature, and, as I have suggested, many of them show the hand of skilled poets. Throughout Europe there has been a continual movement of *motifs* and forms from the poetry of the *élite* into folk tradition. But there has also been a movement in the opposite direction. The ballads have exerted an influence on learned literature during at least the last four centuries, and they have been important in the history of taste, and above all in the history of Romanticism.

They made their earliest impact on learned literature through the medium of the broadsides. The development of cheap printing at the beginning of the sixteenth century caused a revolution in popular taste. Poems were printed on folio sheets, sometimes in two quarto pages, with the title of a known tune to which they could be sung, and often with a rough wood-cut illustration. Publishers began to produce these sheets in the first decades of the sixteenth century, but it was not until after the middle of the century that they appeared in large numbers. Most of these poems, but not all, were narrative songs, and the majority were written in the quatrain of the traditional ballads. A certain number of the traditional ballads were printed in this way, but the great majority of the broadsides were original compositions. They represent a commercial exploitation of the popular taste for the traditional ballads, and they were the nearest thing that the Elizabethans had to a popular press. A great number are journalistic in subject and as sensationalist as our modern press. Unlike the traditional ballads they are not all anonymous: a few names of the writers have been kept, the most famous being Thomas Deloney (1543?-1600?), whom Nashe calls "the balleting silk-weaver". The printers issued the broadsides to wandering sellers who would sing them at fairs and

then sell the sheets to the country people. The trade was evidently profitable and it expanded greatly at the end of the sixteenth century. Broad­sides had to be registered, and the records of the Stationers' company show how popular they were.

Shakespeare gives the classic picture of the itinerant ballad seller in *A Winter's Tale*: up-to-date broadsides are part of Autolycus's wares:

"Here's one to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money bags at a burden; and how she longed to eat adders' heads and toads carbonadoed.

"*Mopsa*: Is it true, think you?

"*Autolycus*: Very true, and but a month old."

And Autolycus has another one about "a fish that appeared upon the coast on Wednesday the fourscore of April". "Is it true too, think you?" "Five justices' hands at it, and witnesses more than my pack will hold."

There is a fine study of the broadsides by Sir Charles Firth,<sup>1</sup> who says: "Shakespeare was as familiar with the English ballads of his time as Burns was with the songs of Scotland", and he points out the large number of references to them in the plays. They show the outlook of the townsman, in that they are topical, and, like other bourgeois art, often indecent. Falstaff threatens Hal that he will have "ballads made on you all and sung to filthy tunes" (*I Henry IV*, II, 2) and Cleopatra tells Iras that if they are led in triumph "scald rhymers" will "ballad us out of tune". But sometimes the broadsides were moralist, and, as Firth says, "discharged the functions of the modern pulpit", or existing ballads were moralized. The topics of the journalistic ballads are much the same as those of the modern cheap press, public calamities, crises, scandals, and victories. Falstaff wants his capture of Coleville immortalized "in a particular ballad with my own picture on the top on't, Coleville kissing my foot" (*II Henry IV*, IV, 3). The surprises at the end of *A Winter's Tale* cause the comment: "Such a deed of wonder is broken out within this hour that the ballad makers cannot be able to express it." A fairly stiff censorship was imposed: for example, no ballad

on the death of Essex was allowed until after the death of Elizabeth. The ballad makers were, however, loyal in their sentiments, though they occasionally expressed social criticism like discontent against landlords.

After journalistic subjects, the most popular were stories taken from the Bible (like the ballad referred to in Hamlet's "Jeptha, judge of Israel") and from the classics. One of the oldest ballads is about Troilus, and, as Firth says, there is "nothing absurd in supposing that Elizabethan artisans were familiar with the story of Pyramus". English history was used; the ballad makers ransacked Holinshed and other chroniclers, and they may have contributed details to Shakespeare's History Plays. But it is often difficult to say which came first in Elizabethan literature, the play or the ballad. For example, a ballad on Dr. Faustus antedated Marlowe by eight years, but Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* was probably the source of the ballad with that title, as is the case with *King Lear*. Shakespeare used the ballads not only as material to work on, but also as a body of common knowledge to which he could make direct or indirect allusions in the certainty that his audience would get the point.

It can be seen that most of the broadsides were very different in origin and content from the traditional ballads. Some of them have great literary merit, showing a highly developed lyrical technique and even great imaginative force, as, for example, "Loving Mad Tom"<sup>2</sup>:

The moon's my constant mistress  
And the lovely owl my marrow  
The flaming drake  
And the night crow, make  
Me music to my sorrow.

But they lack the peculiar virtues of the traditional ballads. They tell their stories, not with the dramatic compression of the latter, but in the more leisurely manner of the "vulgar ballads". "The Babes in the Wood", most famous of vulgar ballads, is the typical broadside, registered in 1595 as "The Norfolk

Gentleman, his Will and Testament and how he committed the keeping of his children to his own brother, who delte most wickedly with them and how God plagued him for it".

It has been suggested that the journalistic broadsides caused a decline in the singing of the traditional ballads, especially in the south of England where the ballad sellers flooded the countryside with their sheets. Gerould attributes the predominance of Scottish versions to the fact that Scotland suffered less in this respect: "It is not a question of a finer development in Scotland than in England, but of an earlier decay in regions nearer London as a result of the infiltration of songs from Grub Street."<sup>3</sup> Modern collectors have, however, shown that many of the traditional ballads in fact survived in areas within the range of Grub Street, and the predominance of Scottish versions in Child comes rather from the fact that most of the early nineteenth-century collectors were Scottish. As for the suggestion that the broadsides brought about a decline in folksong generally, it is certainly possible that the printed sheets had a higher prestige than oral songs among the country people. The insistence on truth in the passages quoted above from *A Winter's Tale* may be significant, and so may Mopsa's other comment on the subject: "I love a ballad in print and life, for then we are sure they are true." But it would be wrong to make too much of this point, for many traditional ballads were, in fact, printed on early broadsides. Over fifty of Child's texts come from this source, including "Fair Margaret and Sweet William" (74 A), "Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard" (81 A), both of which are quoted in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and such typical supernatural ballads as "Riddles Wisely Expounded" (1 A), "The Elfin Knight" (2 A), and "The Twa Sisters" (10 A). And again, as I have suggested, the broadsides have had a profound influence on the oral transmission of certain traditional ballads, notably in stabilizing one of the versions of "Lord Thomas and Fair Elinor" (73 D). It would be truer to say that both types of ballad have gone on surviving side by side in the countryside, the journalistic broadsides perhaps more fashionable at the time but also more



ephemeral, the traditional ballads despised by Mopsas but more enduring. The distinction between the typical broadside and the typical traditional ballad is an æsthetic one, and it is only quite recently that it has been made at all. Before the nineteenth century, people never spoke of the two types as in any way different.

The first sign of any literary appreciation of the ballads is Sir Philip Sidney's famous remark in his *Apology for Poetry*, presumably about some version of "Chevy Chase": "I never heard the old song of *Percy* and *Douglas* that I found not my heart mooved more than with a trumpet; and yet it is sung but by some blinde Crowder, with no rougher voyce, than rude style." Sidney was partly apologizing for his barbarity and partly asserting that "Chevy Chase" was good poetry because it instructed as well as delighted: it promoted the epic virtue of magnanimity, making it shine throughout all misty fearfulness and foggy desires. But Sidney's praise was exceptional; other Elizabethans speak scornfully of the ballads. Ben Jonson takes off the connoisseur of ballads in *Bartholomew Fair*, where Squire Cokes recalls "the ballads over the nursery chimney at home of my own pasting up".

Nevertheless, the ballads did play an important part in English literary life of the seventeenth century. They were all known by intellectuals and ploughmen alike. One of John Aubrey's anecdotes is about the poet, John Corbet, later a bishop, and a Doctor of Divinity at this time, going to Abingdon on a market day. "The ballad singer complayned, he had no custome, he could not put off his ballades. The Jolly Docter putts off his gowne, and putts on the ballad-singer's leathern-jacket, and being a handsome man, and had a full rare voice, he presently vended a great many, and had a great audience."

A few antiquarians or men of a curious spirit made collections of broadsides. The most famous is Pepys's, finished in 1703, which has over sixteen hundred, a thousand of them unique. Although the broadsides were despised, they became an accepted literary form for burlesque or mock heroic. Many ballads of this kind were produced by literary men of the

eighteenth century, including Swift and Cowper; they are sometimes excellent in their own way, but have little in common with folk-literature.

The next major event in the history of ballad criticism, and perhaps the first sign of a genuine appreciation, is Addison's appraisal of "Chevy Chase". In 1711, he published two remarkable *Spectators*<sup>4</sup> on what he called "the favourite Ballad of the people of England". The theory underlying his criticism is not very different from that of Sidney's. According to neo-classical dogma, poetry must instruct and delight: epic poetry is the highest kind of literature because it gives instruction in the best kind of principles. "The greatest modern critics have laid it down as a rule, that an Heroic poem should be founded upon some important precept of Morality, adapted to the constitution of the country in which the Poet writes. *Homer* and *Virgil* have formed their plans in this view." Addison showed great originality and daring when he put "Chevy Chase" on the same plane as the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*. "The Poet before us has not only found out an Hero in his own country, but raises the reputation of it by several beautiful incidents." He quotes the heroic end of Earl Douglas:

Who never spoke more words than these;  
Fight on my merry men all!  
For why, my life is at an end,  
Lord Percy sees my fall.

and compares it with the death of Turnus in the *Æneid*. He begins cautiously in the first article: "Earl Percy's Lamentation over his enemy is generous, beautiful and passionate; I must only caution the reader not to let the simplicity of the style, which one may well pardon in so old a poet, prejudice him against the greatness of the Thought." But he finally warms up to the point of praising the style itself: he compares its simplicity with the simplicity of the Ancients and says that it is not "Gothic", but truly classical. ("Gothic", he applies to what he calls the false wit of the Metaphysical poets.) "Homer, Virgil, or Milton, so far as the language of their

poems is understood, will please a reader of plain common-sense, who could neither relish nor comprehend an epigram of Martial or a poem of Cowley. So, on the contrary, an ordinary song or ballad, that is the delight of the common people, cannot fail to please all such readers as are not unqualified for the entertainment by their affectation or ignorance: and the reason is plain, because the same paintings of nature which recommend it to the ordinary reader will appear beautiful to the most refined." Addison was indeed unconventional and far-sighted in these essays, and he was taken to task by his fellow neo-classics. In the first half of the eighteenth century it was fashionable to sneer at this eccentric quirk of taste on the part of an otherwise impeccable critic.

But under the surface of Augustan correctness, a true revolution in taste was beginning. Despite the dominant influence of Pope, writers and critics began to look for poetry that would be simple, sensuous, and passionate. The superiority of "nature" to "art" was not a new concept in eighteenth-century thought; a kind of primitivism had been part of the European climate of thought since the Renaissance. The belief that man was somehow better in a "natural" state can be traced back to Montaigne and was certainly widely held long before Rousseau elaborated his doctrine of the Noble Savage: it is expressed by Pope:

Can that offend great Nature's God  
Which Nature's self inspires?

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, primitivism became transferred to nature, in the sense of scenery; that, too, was somehow better in a natural state. This belief lay behind the gardens of Capability Brown and Kent, with their ha-has or invisible fences, their dead trees carefully planted in picturesque situations; even Pope's grotto was a rather contorted product of the "cult" of nature. As Lovejoy points out,<sup>5</sup> it was only a matter of time before this primitivism became extended from philosophy and gardening to literature; someone was bound to say that poetry, too, would be better

if it were in a state of nature. Lovejoy gives Warton's poem, "The Enthusiast" (1740), as the first instance:

What are the lays of artful Addison  
Coldly correct, to Shakespeare's warblings wild.

But we have already seen a hint of the same doctrine in Addison's own criticism, though certainly not in his lays. Fantastic as it now seems, others besides Warton looked upon Shakespeare as the child of Nature, who had produced his warblings without the help of rules; and the new complex of feeling about nature had something to do with the growing appreciation of Shakespeare in the first half of the eighteenth century. Despite their outward adherence to correctness and neo-classical dogma in poetry, readers were becoming prepared to accept the ballads. A few collections were made in England and Scotland in the first decades of the eighteenth century: *A Collection of Old Ballads* (1724) consisted mainly of broadsides, but Allan Ramsay's *Evergreen* (1724) and *The Tea Table Miscellany* (1724-7) contained some folksongs. The Foulis brothers in Glasgow printed "Gill Nourrice", "Young Waters", and "Edom o Gordon" in 1755. Gray quotes the first of these in a letter to Mason (1757) and showed great critical acumen when he described it as beginning in the fifth act; that was the first attempt to judge ballads on their own grounds. The swing-over in taste had already begun when Percy produced his *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* in 1765, but that work did most to accelerate it. It caused more excitement all over Northern Europe than almost any other book of the period except MacPherson's *Ossian*, a bogus primitive epic which met much the same demands. Percy suffered a conflict between his impulse to reveal the poetry of nature and his anxiety about conforming with current good taste. He felt he could not leave in their crudity the poems from the seventeenth-century folio he had rescued from the house-maids, and so he tricked them out to meet the contemporary requirements of correctness. He added a few contemporary ballad versions sent to him from Scotland, some broadsides, and some mediæval

verse. As scholarship, the collection is useless, and it is highly uneven in literary value; it is nevertheless a remarkable achievement.

Largely through the *Reliques*, the ballads influenced many of the poets of the middle eighteenth century. Dr. Johnson resisted to the end what he considered a deplorable deviation from neo-classical standards. In 1777, "he observed that a gentleman of eminence in literature had got into a bad style of poetry of late. . . . Boswell: That is owing his being much versant in Old English Poetry. Johnson: What is that to the purpose, Sir? If I say a man is drunk and you tell me it is owing to his taking much drink, the matter is not mended. No, Sir — has taken to an odd mode." (And he then produced his famous parody: 'Hermit hoar, in solemn cell' ".)

Percy's *Reliques* caused an even greater stir in Germany than in England. The younger German writers were looking for poetry that would be natural rather than artificial, popular rather than aristocratic and national rather than cosmopolitan; there were strong political and social influences which made them ready to accept the *Reliques*. Percy's work stimulated them into searching their own folk-tradition. The first result was Bürger's "Lenore" (1773), a combination of a Low German folktale and of "Sweet William's Ghost" from Percy. Bürger presents the international theme of the Dead Rider, who carries off his love to the grave, with some very "Gothic" effects of gallows and coffins, and with some heavy moralizing. Though it is not very like folksong, it is extremely original. In the same year, Herder included a translation of Percy's "Edward" in his *Correspondence of Ossian*:

Dein Schwert, wie ist's von Blut so rot?  
Edward, Edward!

He included a revised version of this in his *Volkslieder* (1778-9), which is a collection and translation of folksongs from many nations. Many of Goethe's earlier poems were written under the same stimulus; for example, "Erlkönig" (1782)

owes something to Herder's translations of the Danish ballads.

The stimulus of Percy's *Reliques* came back from Germany to this country like a boomerang. In the 1790's, Walter Scott translated Bürger's "Lenore" (inaccurately), and Goethe's "Erlkönig", as well as some traditional German ballads. Scott's translations are poor poetry, but mark an important stage in the Romantic Revival. The Germans inspired Scott to collect and to adapt the traditional ballads of his own district, and to write his own poetry in the ballad style. Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* was published in 1802-3, and by that time, a number of collections had been issued, including David Herd's, Ritson's, and Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (to which Burns contributed). The ballads had won their status as serious poetry.

In 1798, appeared the most famous book of all to bear their name. Wordsworth, curiously enough, was less influenced by Percy's *Reliques* or the traditional ballads than by the broadsides. This embarrassing fact is proved by the way he quotes in his Preface a stanza from "The Babes in the Wood"; and elsewhere, his remarks on "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" show that he was thinking of the broadsides. They did not do Wordsworth any good but rather encouraged the naïveté of his worst poetry. Coleridge, on the other hand, learned a great deal from the traditional ballads. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was professedly written in imitation of the style as well as the spirit of the elder poets, and Coleridge has taken over and transmuted the rhythm, diction, and atmosphere of the best supernatural ballads.

The ballads then became part of the heritage of the nineteenth-century poets, to be rediscovered and used by each generation in turn. After "The Ancient Mariner", the finest transformation of the ballad form into literature is "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". Matthew Arnold based "The Forsaken Merman" on a Danish ballad story, but not on ballad forms: the result is far removed from folksong. The Pre-Raphaelites' generation took the ballads for their own purposes: William Morris wrote an admirable pastiche called "Two Red Roses

across the Moon", and less happily, Rossetti painted Clerk Saunders' portrait. Swinburne was also an enthusiast and came near to reproducing the "ballad note". It is possible that the ballads are now an exhausted vein, that the poets have no more to learn from them for the time being. Yet in the 1930's, one of the "little reviews" which had a Surrealistic ambience was publishing modern American versions: and with their violent and shocking imagery they did not look out of place beside the last flarings of European Romanticism.

## BALLAD SCHOLARSHIP

THE earlier history of ballad scholarship cannot easily be disentangled from the history of ideas and literary taste. The literary and philosophical obsessions of the first editors interfered with their methods of preparing their texts. Percy's conflict between his antiquarian and his æsthetic principles and Scott's combination of objective collecting and literary activity are comparable with eighteenth-century Shakespearian scholarship: "editing" meant "improving". Ballad scholarship in the true sense began only when editors treated their texts with respect. Two things helped to bring this about; the application of the rigorous methods of classical philology to English literature and folklore, and the romantic spirit of the antiquarians. Joseph Ritson in the 1780's and '90's was the pioneer of accurate ballad scholarship. He kept up a bitter polemic against Percy's tampering and the more blatant forgeries of Pinkerton. Ritson had apparently no restraining influence on Scott, but his example came to be followed by others. One of the earliest collectors to approach modern standards of integrity was William Motherwell, who put down in his *Minstrelsy Ancient and Modern* (1827) songs almost exactly as he had heard them from folksingers. Romanticism also helped to bring about the change in literary practice. From the complex of feelings about "nature", as outlined in the last chapter, there arose the feeling that what was least touched by art was necessarily the best, and that an unaltered version of a folksong had a certain absolute value. Primitivism also helped to spread the belief (which has died hard in folklore studies), that the oldest versions of a ballad were the best because nearest to nature, and this encouraged the search for early texts. The scruples about good taste and propriety, which had held Percy back, gradually disappeared. As a result of these two forces, ballad editing gradually improved through-



out the early nineteenth century. Svend Grundtvig was impressed by Motherwell's example and used modern methods in his edition of the Danish Ballads *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser*, begun in 1853. Child, in his turn, was impressed by Grundtvig and followed his example by printing all the available texts of the British ballads that he thought worthy of the name. Child's first edition was published in 1857-9. After it had come out, a major source of ballads became available: Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, which Percy had failed to produce in reply to Ritson's taunts and which later owners had long refused to let any scholars see, was adequately edited in 1867-8 by J. W. Hales and Frederick J. Furnivall (the latter a Shakespearian scholar). With the addition of this work and of dozens of other sources he had tracked down, including Scott's and Motherwell's manuscripts, Child began his second edition. The principles he laid down have since been followed by almost all collectors and editors.

It is even harder to separate the theoretical side of ballad criticism from its philosophical background. Speculations about origins, which were to become the central topic in books written about the ballads, do not appear very much in the earlier stages of British scholarship. Percy and Scott were content to regard all ballads alike as the work of minstrels of the Middle Ages or later. But the subject was forced into view by the immense pressure of the German theorists. The philosophical and political obsessions which attracted the *Sturm und Drang* writers to folksong and made them imitate and adapt it, appear in an even more striking form in their critical views. They constructed a colossal antithesis between the poetry of nature and the poetry of art, the one spontaneous, primitive and national, the other forced, sophisticated and cosmopolitan, and they identified the latter with French civilization which dominated Europe in the eighteenth century, and which they at once despised and envied.

It was maintained that *Volklied*, the noble art of the savage community, had been created by the people, but exactly how this was done was not at first clearly stated. Herder was comparatively cautious, the brothers Grimm were

bolder and more mystical. With the latter is associated the classic formulation of Romantic theory, "Das Volk dichtet", the people makes the poetry—if such an emotive word as "Volk" can be thus translated. It is apparently not certain that this phrase was ever used by the Grimms, but Jakob Grimm did say "every *epos* must compose itself, must make itself, and can be written by no poet".<sup>1</sup> Davenson points out, in an admirable summary of this period,<sup>2</sup> that *Volkslied* then carried a much wider connotation than the modern word folksong, since primitive poetry was held to include Homer, the Niebelungenlied, the Bible, and Ossian. Whilst classical philology has long been freed from these Romantic phantoms and no one would think it worth while to discuss in what sense the Iliad is the expression of the Greek people, folklore studies have remained in their power. Of all forms of folklore, the ballads came to be the one on which the discussion about origins centred.

German influence was not immediately noticeable in Britain, where scholars of the ballad confined themselves to editing for the most part. Robert Chambers was one of the first in the nineteenth century to make general statements about origins<sup>3</sup>: he supported individual authorship. Most of his assertions are untenable, but he showed acumen in pointing out the "literary" quality of the Scottish versions printed by Percy. Later in the century, the theory of communal origins appeared in full force, stimulated by discoveries that had been made in the field of anthropology. The first to formulate this theory in English seems to have been Andrew Lang, one of the "anthropological" school of folklorists, in 1875,<sup>4</sup> but it was in the United States of America that the "communalist" theory came to full flower. The prestige of German scholarship had been higher in America than in England, and there generous democratic feelings became allied with Romantic primitivism. Perhaps the same feeling of inferiority as that which the German had felt towards foreign sophisticated culture also helped to stimulate the Americans.

Child himself should have been the first figure of modern

ballad criticism, but unfortunately he left no definite statement. His article in *Johnson's Encyclopædia* (1895) is vague and rather non-committal about origins. He says that "the historical and natural place" of the ballads is "anterior to the appearance of poetry of art, to which it formed a step, and by which it has been regularly displaced and, in some cases, almost extinguished . . ." and again: "Though they do not write themselves as William Grimm said, though a man and not a people has composed them, still the author counts for nothing, and it is not by mere accident but with the best reasons that they have come down to us anonymous." These words, even in their context, are ambiguous enough to allow many interpretations. Child's followers were not so vague. In 1894, F. B. Gummere outlined the modern version of the communalist theory, and developed it in a series of books and articles.<sup>5</sup> The most easily available account is in the chapter in Volume II of the *Cambridge History of Literature* (1908). Gummere added a little anthropology to Grimm's "Das Volk dichtet". He asserted in *The Beginnings of Poetry* that the ballads are among the most primitive kinds of poetry; that they were created by the improvization of the singing and dancing throng, and that this creation took place at the festivals of the undifferentiated folk. According to Gummere, various members of the singing and dancing throng improvised verses about something important that had taken place in the community, and the whole throng would sing the chorus. From these improvisations the complete ballad was built up, the work of no single person. He invented the useful term "incremental repetition" to describe a familiar device by which "each stanza repeats the substance of the preceding, but with some variation which advances the story"; and he offered the refrains and incremental repetition found in many ballads as evidence of the communal process. "Basing one's assertion on these elements of recurrent refrain and alternate improvisation, one could safely define the ballad by origins, as a narrative lyric made and sung at the dance and handed down in popular tradition."<sup>6</sup> At a later period, he said, there was a "dwindling of lyric and choral elements in favour of epic",

or, in other words, the continuous narrative developed from the ballad based on a single situation.

Gummere received the powerful support of G. L. Kittredge in the introduction to the one-volume selected edition of Child's work published in 1904.<sup>7</sup> Kittredge repeated the arguments based on repetition and refrain, and added in italics, "the popular ballads are really popular, that is, they belong to the folk". The ballads' author, this "homogeneous folk—that is, the community whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom—is no fiction; examples in abundance have been observed and recorded". Like Gummere, he produced analogies to the process of communal improvisation: "in the Färöe Islands, a few generations ago, it was common for a group to surround some fisherman who had been unlucky, or had otherwise laid himself open to ridicule, and to improvise a song about him, each contributing his verse or stanza". He admitted that some of our ballads were the work of minstrels, but insisted that: "It is capable of practically formal proof, that for the last two or three centuries the English and Scottish ballads have not, as a general thing, been sung and transmitted by professional minstrels or their representatives", and, more rashly, he says: "There is no reason whatever for believing that the state of things between 1300 and 1600 was different, in this regard, from that between 1600 and 1900, and many reasons for believing that it was not different." Thanks to Kittredge's eloquence and learning, communal origins became something of a dogma in the United States.

W. J. Courthorpe had been almost the last critic who had not taken part in the communalist controversy. In his *History of English Poetry* (Volume I, 1895), he had simply developed Percy's views on minstrelsy: All ballads were the work of degenerate minstrels, and all alike had a literary ancestry in mediæval romances, fabliaux, and legends—his generalizations were as rash as any of Gummere's. From the 1890's onwards most critics felt compelled to support or attack Gummere's theories. T. F. Henderson, in *Scottish Vernacular Literature* (1898) and in *The Ballad in Literature* (1912) took an extreme

individualist stand. He asserted that each of the ballads had one definite author and a learned one; that "the people" are completely uncreative and that the ballads could only degenerate in the course of oral transmission. The most savage assault on the "communalists" was made by Professor Louise Pound in *Poetic Origins and the Ballad* (1921). She produced anthropological evidence to show that communal composition is by no means universal among primitive peoples, and that the analogies produced by Gummere do not prove anything. She pointed out that there was no certain connection between the ballads and dance songs, since incremental repetition and refrain are not found universally in the ballads, not even in their earliest versions, and she drew attention to the "literary" quality of many of the ballads. Unfortunately, she suggested a close connection between the Church and the earliest ballads, which, for a number of reasons already mentioned, is extremely unlikely.

In *Studies in Literature* (1918), "Q" attacked the communalists with charm and common sense, but he made two generalizations hardly supported by the facts; namely, that the ballads' "area" was between "the Forth and the Tyne", and that their "period" was between 1350 and 1500. He also suggested that the best ballads had been written by one anonymous genius of that time and place.

The last important statement in England of the communalist case is by Robert Graves in a neat summary prefacing his anthology, *The English Ballad* (1927). Then the atmosphere was cleared by Gerould's masterly study, *The Ballad of Tradition* (1932). He was the first to reformulate the argument about origins and to explain that there were really three separate questions to be considered: first, the origin of the ballad method of narrative, which is a constant throughout Europe; secondly, the origin of the ballads' musical and poetic form, which varies from country to country; and thirdly, the origin of each individual ballad. As regards the first question, he insisted that the dramatic and impersonal technique shared by all European ballads cannot be traced far back into the Middle Ages and that the poetic habits of primitive peoples

do not help us to explain the early history of our ballads. He suggested, very reasonably, that the peculiarities in the ballads' technique can be explained by the fact that each is "moulded to fit a recurrent melody. Their compression, their centralization, with the impersonality that results from the dramatic treatment of a theme, and, above all, the swiftly moving action, are precisely the qualities that would arise, almost inevitably, from the practice of singing stories to brief tunes".<sup>8</sup> In discussing the second question, he suggested that the traditional pattern of the ballads could have grown out of actual mediæval verse-forms; and thirdly, he concluded, after studying the little evidence available on the origins of particular ballads, that most of them have been composed by individuals. Gerould showed that incremental repetition should be regarded as part of the ballads' rhetoric and not as evidence of communal improvisation. The most important part of Gerould's book is that dealing with communal "re-creation". He demonstrates that in the course of oral transmission from one generation to another, a ballad does not necessarily degenerate but may in fact, improve, and that many of the best characteristics of ballad poetry are the result of successive variations by a series of folksingers. He applied to ballad poetry a conclusion that Cecil Sharp had already reached about its music: "the most typical qualities about the folksong have been laboriously acquired during its journey down the ages, in the course of which its individual angles and irregularities have been rubbed and smoothed away, just as the pebble on the seashore has been rounded by the action of the waves".<sup>9</sup> Gerould's attitude makes the question of origins seem of secondary importance and it helps to free the literary criticism of the ballads from antiquarian purism, since "beauty may come in at any point"<sup>10</sup> in the process of oral transmission. His views on communal re-creation are generally acceptable, but it may be felt that he paid very little attention to the "literary" quality of the best ballad versions, or the reshaping of traditional material which I have discussed in Chapter VI.

Since the appearance of Gerould's book, the controversy about origins seems to have died down. It hardly comes into

the most recent work, W. J. Entwistle's *European Balladry* (1939). This is a very learned survey of the ballads of every country of Europe, and those who do not know a dozen languages must be grateful to it. It does not, however, add very much to the interpretation of the British ballads. Some of Entwistle's conjectures, particularly about dates, have been dealt with by Sir E. K. Chambers in a short, extremely close-packed and anti-Romantic article in the *Oxford History of English Literature* (*English Literature at the Close of the Middle Age*, 1945).

Throughout the discussions on origins there has been a good deal of shadow-boxing. The American supporters of communal improvisation admitted that it did not apply to any of the actual English or Scottish ballads. Gummere said that the formula defining the ballads which I have quoted above, was "strictly valid only for vanished and primitive days". Kittredge agreed that "the extant ballads of England and Scotland . . . were not themselves composed in this way, but were, in the first instance, the work of individual authors, at least in the great majority of cases".<sup>11</sup> The most he claimed was that communal composition, "though it cannot be proved for any of the Scottish and English ballads, is not improbable for some of them. The actual facts with regard to any particular piece in this collection are beyond our knowledge, and the matter need not be insisted on. Even if none of our ballads were composed in this way, still many of them conform to a type which was established under the conditions of authorship referred to. . . ."<sup>12</sup> That is as much as to say that the theory applies only to hypothetical and unknowable ballads which may have existed in the irrecoverable past, applies as it were to the Platonic Idea of a Ballad which lies behind all phenomenal ballads. Their opponents scarcely seem to have noticed that the communalists had made admissions which reduced their case to such a point of unreality. The controversy remained rather up in the air, neither side making much attempt to support their views with the detailed history of particular ballads. It is now fairly certain that communal improvisation can take place; something like it has been seen in primitive

and peasant communities, as the many examples produced by Gummere and others seem to show. But it is equally certain that it can hardly have produced the ballad versions we possess, and because this fact was forgotten, most of the controversy about origins remained unreal.

Another questionable assumption has been maintained during the argument, namely, that such a thing as a pure folk-culture really exists. Except in primitive communities in which a "homogeneous folk" in Kittredge's phrase, may be found, the concept of an art belonging wholly to the folk is a fiction, or at best, a mathematical "limit" which is never reached. That such an assumption has been maintained so widely in ballad scholarship can probably be traced back to German habits of thought, as M. Davenson suggests.<sup>13</sup> Between "Folksong" and "Artsong", "Naturpoesie" and "Kunstpoesie", the same kind of antithesis has been established as that which the German sociologists are so fond of making between spiritual Kultur and mechanical Zivilisation, between the organic "community" and the artificial "society". In both instances, the same kind of critical concept is being used. Entities like Folksong and Artsong are dangerous for a critic to handle since he may allow himself to hypostatize them and to end "in all innocence by using them as if they connoted classes of empirical reality". "Pure" Folksong in the sense of the opposite to Artsong has probably never been found in historic Europe. On the contrary, there has been a continuous descent of learned literature into oral tradition, a continual "contamination" of popular literature by Art. Folksingers include in their repertoire all kinds of material including recent poems by known authors, and they appear to make no distinction between these and songs which scholars describe as traditional. The influence of the literature and music of the *élite* on folksingers has been studied by Meier and other German scholars who have opposed the more orthodox opinion of their countrymen. The title of Meier's book, *Artsongs in the mouth of the People* (*Kunstlieder im Volksmunde*, 1906), shows his approach. French scholars, also, have studied their own folksongs in the same way, and have shown that



the peasantry have taken up tunes from known composers such as Rameau and Lully, and that such a "typical" folksong as "Au Clair de la Lune" was written in Paris as late as the 1790's. English folksong has not been examined in such detail, but it has been proved to be full of learned material, such as eighteenth-century pastoral rubbish about "Colin" and "Chloe". "Kathleen", a pastiche in the ballad manner written by John Greenleaf Whittier, has been taken up by New England folksingers, its words altered and cut down by re-creation. Broad-sides like the "Babes in the Wood", have often slipped from print into oral tradition. Thus any critic who took popularity among folksingers as a criterion of the traditional song would have to accept a great deal of material which is definitely "unpopular" in one sense of the word. In other words, if a purist collector were to exclude everything that showed the slightest contamination by learned music and poetry, he would be left with only a few shepherds' calls, lullabies, or labour songs like the sea-shanties. These shanties are perhaps the nearest thing we have to "pure" folksong, with their functional purpose, their rhythm designed to suit the action of a group and thus to save energy—"Away, haul away, boys, haul away, Oh!"—and the small amount of narrative between the rhythmical climaxes:

First he beat the Prussians,  
Oh, high ho!  
Then he beat the Russians  
John Franzwo!

But such things make up a very small part of any national collection of folksong, and the ballads with their highly developed narratives can hardly be classed among them. The ballads, like most of the other types of folksong, are "contaminated" not only in their beginnings but also throughout their history.

But this is not to say that there is no such thing as an art created by illiterate people. Some of the opponents of the communalists seem to have implied that such is the case;

that illiterate people can only take over the creations of literate poets and preserve them more or less imperfectly. On the contrary, communal re-creation is a very real thing and can transform a commonplace song into one of great beauty, by a succession of small changes made by one folksinger after another. Even folksingers' forgetfulness can be creative: it may improve songs by leaving out *motifs* and expressions which have a particularly "literary" flavour. Folksingers can certainly be creative artists of a kind. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they often introduce modifications which are, in effect, an æsthetic re-shaping of traditional material. Communal re-creation, as Cecil Sharp says, is not essentially different from the method of any single artist. "One is only a magnified reproduction of the other, on an immense scale; in principle they are identical. A melody is not suddenly born in the composer's mind ready made, complete in every detail. On the contrary, it assumes many shapes, and suffers innumerable changes before it reaches the form which satisfies him and which he ultimately uses. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Behind the discussion by the critics about whether the folk can create, there seems to lurk the Romantic notion of absolute creation. According to this view, only that which is entirely new and original and a single act can be called creation. The communalists naturally ascribed this mysterious act of creation to the "folk", whilst their opponents insisted that it could happen only to individual poets. It is, in fact, doubtful if such a miraculous event can ever take place, since every poet works in a tradition, and "creates" by modifying what has been handed down to him by the poets of the past. All art is a collaboration between the living and the dead, and folk art mainly differs from the art of the *élite* in that this collaboration is more obvious.

Folk art is not simply passive. It not only receives from learned art, but it also exerts an active influence on learned art itself. The ballads have been a stimulus to many of the English poets, and there has been a continual ascent of *motifs* and forms from other kinds of folklore. Chaucer and Boccaccio drew a great deal from folktales, and folksongs underlie our

Elizabethan lyrics. In every age it would seem that writers have been interested in folk-tradition; "La Curiosité permanente de l'élite", as M. Davenson calls it. Just as there is no such thing as a pure folk art, so perhaps there has never been a "pure" art of the *élite*, unaffected by that of the folk.

The history of English literature and apparently of European literature shows that there has always been an interaction between folk and learned art. A given story, poem or song may move several times up and down the social scale in the course of its development. Goethe's "Heidenröslein" has been mentioned as an æsthetic re-shaping of a traditional song; it has since become the standard version used by the folk-singers of Germany. In this country, the greatest refashioner of folksong was Robert Burns, and many of his revisions have passed back into oral currency. This interaction is shown clearly in the history of the ballad "Our Goodman" (274), a fabliau-like song about outwitting a cuckold. The Scottish eighteenth-century version begins:

Hame came our goodman,  
 And hame came he,  
 And then he saw a saddle-horse,  
 Where nae horse should be.  
 'What's this now, goodwife,  
 What's this I see,  
 How came this horse here,  
 Without the leave of me?'  
 'A horse?' quo she.  
 'Ay, a horse,' quo he.  
 'Shame fa your cuckold face,  
 Ill mat ye see!  
 'Tis naething but a broad sow,  
 My minnie sent to me.'  
 'A broad sow?' quo he.  
 'Ay, a sow,' quo shee.  
 'Far hae I ridden,  
 And farer hae I gane,  
 But a saddle on a sow's back  
 I never saw nane.'

and similarly through a number of stanzas in which the wife explains away a pair of jackboots, a sword, a powdered wig, etc. It ascended into literature in 1789, when Meyer translated into German a broadside version of it called "The Merry Cuckold and his Wife", and gave it a new *dénouement* in which the man beats his wife and explains his blows as caresses sent to her by her mother. Meyer's poem then descended again into folk tradition. To quote Child: "It had a great and immediate success, was circulated as a broadside, and was taken up by the people, in whose mouth it underwent the usual treatment of ballads traditionally propagated. From Germany it spread into Scandinavia and Hungary and perhaps elsewhere." Incidentally, the ballad is still in circulation, and there are a number of versions still about, Scottish, English, and American; and in the 1930's, I learned by word of mouth a Welsh version which is not in Child.

Thus the evidence about the ballads shows that they are not a "pure" folk art in their origins or in their development. Their beginnings have not yet been explained by one single theory. It must be concluded that they have a multiplicity of origins, and that the ballad writers took their material from a variety of sources. Their later history shows the mutual influence of oral tradition, print, and learned re-shaping. The ballads can be defined neither by their origins nor by the circumstances of their collection. They are not a category to be defined scientifically, but an art form with its own particular rules.

There is, therefore, no general problem of the ballads, but only a number of special problems presented by the history of individual ballads, and by various aspects of the ballads. The most useful part of recent ballad scholarship has been about such problems. One, for example, is the relationship between ballads and the dance. Danish critics have traced the influence of the mediæval carole on the refrains and stanza forms of their ballads. The most valuable of these studies

are J. C. H. R. Steenstrup's and Axel Olrik's. Of the English critics, W. P. Ker did most to study the relationship of our ballads to the Danish and of both to the mediæval dance. The papers dealing with this subject are in his *Collected Essays* (1925) and *Form and Style in Poetry* (1928), and there is a short summary in his classic *English Literature: Medieval* (Home University Library, 1912). Other special studies have dealt with ballad music (Cecil Sharp and American scholars like Philipps Barry) and ballad folklore (Wimberly and Stith Thomson). The most promising type of enquiry is detailed research into the variants of a particular ballad (Archer Taylor's study of "Edward" and Miss Gilchrist's of "Lamkin"). I have tried to summarize the work of these scholars, in the hope that it may help to bring about a more realistic approach to the ballads and a keener enjoyment of their poetry.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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8. F. Sidgwick, *Notes and Queries*, 29th July, 1905.
9. J.F.S.S., IV, pp. 29-47.
10. "The trees they do grow high", Cecil Sharp, *Folksongs from Somerset*, Novello & Co., Ltd., London, 1904-9, Vol. I (tune); J.F.S.S., II, p. 44 (text). The version printed here is composite.
11. J.F.S.S., III, pp. 170-90; *Ibid.* V, pp. 79-80; and cf. A. L. Lloyd, *The Singing Englishman*, London, n.d.
12. S. Baring-Gould and H. F. Sheppard, *Songs of the West*, London, 1889-91.
13. L. Broadwood and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, *English County Songs*, London, 1893.

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17. P. Barry, F. H. Eckstorm, and M. W. Smyth, *British Ballads from Maine*, New Haven, Conn., 1929.

## CHAPTER II

1. S. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, London, 1943. I am indebted to Mr Hugh Sykes Davies for this suggestion.
2. C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Oxford, 1942, discusses the function of conventional language in epic.
3. It has been suggested that in some cases these apparently irrelevant refrains have a point; that refrains which mention herbs and flowers look nonsensical only because their original meaning has been lost through corruptions: e.g. "Every rose is merry in time" for "Savory, rosemary, thyme". Comparative folklore shows that such herbs were used as apotropæics, for warding off evil spirits. The refrains are therefore relevant to the themes of ballads in which a maiden defends herself against a demon lover. In some versions of "The Elfin Knight", the refrain still seems to have an incantatory purpose.

'And he has asked me questions three,  
 Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.  
 I hope he will answer as many for me,  
 For once he was a true lover of mine.'

See L. Broadwood, *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, III, p. 13, and A. G. Gilchrist, *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 237.

4. G. G. Coulton, *Mediæval Panorama*, Cambridge, 1938, p. 100.
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Hill (c. 1500), and others have been collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from North Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Southern Scotland and the United States. For bibliography see R. L. Greene, *The Early English Carol*, Oxford, 1935. The melody quoted was collected in Derbyshire by R. Vaughan Williams, *Eight Traditional Carols*, Stainer and Bell, London, 1919.

7. A. G. Gilchrist, *J.F.S.S.*, IV, pp. 52-66.

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9. *Melismata. Musicall Phansies, Fitting the Court, Cittie and Country Humours*, London, 1611. (T. Ravenscroft.)

Ballad poetry and symbolism is discussed by John Speirs in *The Scots Literary Tradition*, London, 1940 (an article reprinted from *Scrutiny*, 1935).

It is also possible to interpret many of the images that appear in the ballads as psychoanalytical "symbols", that is, as examples of an unconscious translation of a psychological situation into indirect terms. Freud and Jung have made us familiar with this kind of symbolism and have traced parallels between the images of dreams and those of folklore. It is not difficult to apply their interpretation to such a stanza as this:

For forty days and forty nights  
 He wade thro red blude to the knee,  
 And he saw neither sun nor moon,  
 But heard the roaring of the sea.

"Thomas Rymer", 37 A, 7), which is based on the folklore *motif* of the Water Barrier before the Otherworld, but may also be a vivid parable of birth; or to the "ship" images that appear in "James Harris (The Demon Lover)":

She set her foot upon the ship,  
 No mariners could she behold;  
 But the sails were o the taffetie,  
 And the masts o the beaten gold. (243 F, 9.)



and in "Le Merveilleux Navire" (Doncieux, *Romancero*, no. XXXVII), and in a charming English folksong, "O come all ye little streamers". Thanks to Freud, there is no longer any need to interpret the last in terms of mediæval Gnostic heresies (as is actually done in the *J.F.S.S.*, 1913, IV, pp. 310-19).

O come all you little streamers wherever you may be;  
These are the finest flowers that ever my eyes did see;  
Fine flow'ry hills and fishing dells and hunting also;  
At the top all of this mount-i-ain where the fine flowers grow.

At the top all of this mountain where my love's castle stands,  
'Tis all overbuilt with ivory to the bottom of the stand,  
Fine arches and fine porches and a diamond stone so bright,  
It's a pilot for a sailor on a dark stormy night.

At the bottom of this mountain there runs a river clear,  
A ship from the Indies did once anchor there;  
With her red flags a-flying and abeating of her drum,  
Sweet instruments of music and a firing of her gun.

O if Nancy had proved true to me, she might have been my bride;  
But now she is more changeable than the wind blows on the tide;  
Like a ship that's on the Ocean wide, that tosses to and fro,  
If the angel hadn't directed us, saying 'Where shall we go.'

So come all you little streamers, that walks the meadows gay;  
It's write unto my own true love, wherever she may be;  
The red rose it so entices me and the tongue it tells me no,  
If the angel hadn't directed us, saying 'Where shall we go.'

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*Secretary, Lady Croft.*)

### CHAPTER III

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5. Campbell and Sharp, *op. cit.* Introduction, p. xxix.
6. For an explanation of the modes, see Cecil Sharp, *English Folksong, Some Conclusions*, London, 1907; P. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*; H. Davenson, *Le Livre des Chansons*, Neuchâtel, 1946.
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De la vile issoit pensant      par un matin  
 Maros, si voit la devant      passer Robin;  
 a sa vois qu'ele ot doucete  
 li dist en chantant  
 'alez moi contratendant,  
 je sui vostre amiete.

A la vile une vieille a      qui prent mari  
 Cui amie as noces va      grant route od li.  
 oiant toz ceus qui sunt la  
 commenca a haut cri  
 'je vois as noces mon ami;  
 plus dolente de moi n'i va.'

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